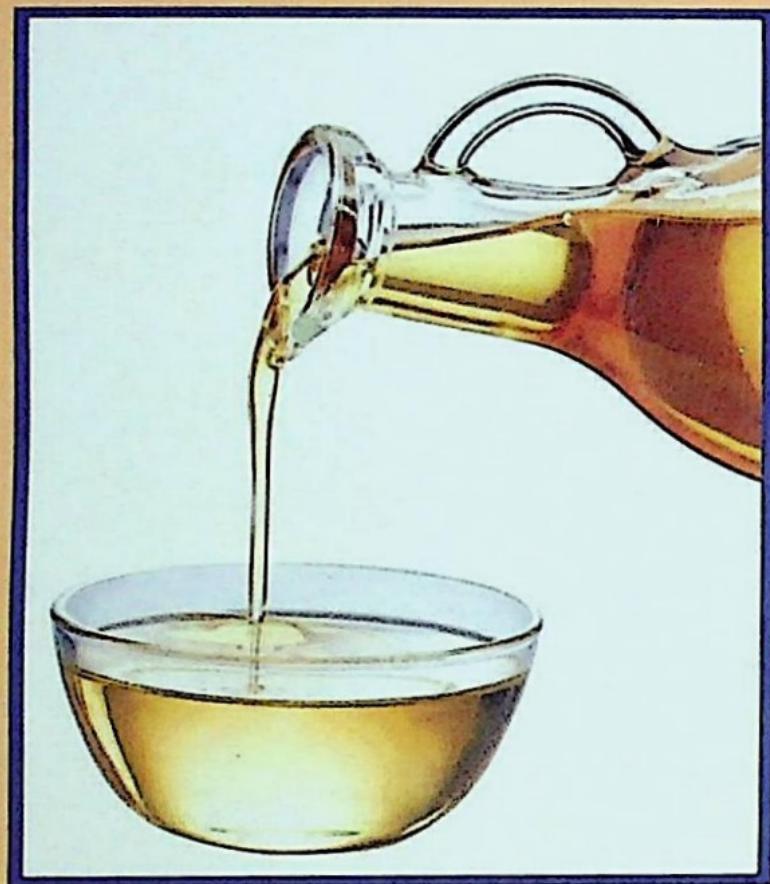


Meditation

AND ITS PREPARATION



*Meditation is a constant remembrance of the thing
meditated upon, flowing like an unbroken stream of oil
poured out from one vessel to another.*

MEDITATION AND ITS PREPARATION

By Eminent Contributors



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Nowadays many people of education and culture both in the East and the West evince keen interest in understanding the science of meditation and its practice. Their objectives vary from attaining a greater measure of mental strength, concentration, stability, and equipoise in day-to-day practical life, to securing the highest spiritual fulfilment, the realization of the divine reality of God underlying the changing universe and the psycho-physical human being. Many books on meditation are available now in the market. But all of them are not reliable in respect of the theoretical content they provide or the practical guidance they suggest as they do not take into consideration the mental makeup of the individual. Consequently, unmethodical meditation, or meditation without necessary preparation sometimes leads

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to frustration and loss of faith for beginners in this grand science of the inner life.

Against this background we have ventured to publish a collection of selected essays dealing with different aspects of meditation and other topics related to the life devoted to it. When these articles were published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, a leading journal of the Ramakrishna Order, they were highly appreciated by the readers. Some of the articles were originally talks on the subject delivered by eminent spiritual ministers of the Order in the West. These essays taken together, certainly do not exhaust all the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. But based as they are on the contributors' long experience in meditation and in helping many fellow travellers along their path, these essays, we believe, will be found both illuminating and useful. It should be mentioned, however, that a novice in this life should always consult an experienced guide concerning his or her personal ways of practice.

1 January 1999

Publisher

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

After a long time of absence from the market, we have now come up with a new edition of the book. This new edition has been revised and updated. It includes new essays dealing with current issues such as climate change and other topics. The book is divided into three main parts: Standard English, Indian English, and American English. It also includes a section on Indian English literature. The book is intended for students of English literature and linguistics, as well as for anyone interested in the study of English language and literature. The book is available online at archive.org/details/muthulakshmiacademy.

MEDITATION, ITS METHODS AND UTILITY*

'Meditation is the focusing of the mind on some object. If the mind acquires concentration on one object, it can be concentrated on any object whatsoever.'

'There must be meditation. Meditation is the one thing. Meditate! The greatest thing is meditation. It is the nearest approach to spiritual life—the mind meditating. It is the one moment in our daily life that we are not material—the Soul thinking of Itself, free from all matter—this marvellous touch of the Soul.'

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

* *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1971.

Nowadays many persons challenge the value of religion. They believe that religion has served its purpose, that it has no more use. But this is not the whole truth. We find even in America that many persons are interested in meditation. So it is not a fact that people do not care for religion; many persons are seeking something.

Then, what is meditation? Those persons who have attempted to meditate, even out of curiosity, know full well how restless the mind can be. One is not aware, while busily engaged in one's daily duties, how restless the mind is. But when one sits quietly and tries to meditate, it is as if Pandora's box had all of a sudden been opened. One is surprised that there are so many things hidden in one's mind—in the subconscious, as the psychologists say.

Mind is like the surface of the ocean. On the surface of the ocean there are always waves. Whether mountain-high waves or ripples, there are always waves. In the same way, there are always waves on the surface of our minds. What are those waves? They are the constant succession of thoughts arising in our

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consciousness. Why do those thoughts come that way? They indicate our desires—conscious desires, and also unconscious or, subconscious desires. In the past, many desires arose in our minds. We could not fulfil most of them, and so they went underground, as it were. They are still there. All of them. And they begin to come to the surface the moment one makes an attempt to meditate. We cannot stop those waves of the mind. It is impossible to suppress them. But we can direct them. we can direct them in a particular way, into particular channels. They are something like the waters of an approaching flood. Though we cannot stop them, we can channel them in a particular direction. When we do that with our minds, it is called meditation.

But what are those desires? How can we prevent new desires from arising? And how can we make those desires which are already in the subconscious mind ineffective? All desires are not bad. There are desires which are pernicious, but there are also desires which are helpful.

To control our desires, we have first to live ethical lives. In that way we can at least control

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the pernicious desires that make an attempt to rise in our minds. It is extremely necessary that we try to live ethical lives. If we want to practise meditation we cannot afford to live wild lives or unregulated lives, victims of every impulse that comes along, good or bad. Sometimes baser impulses come. We cannot afford, in the name of freedom of thought, freedom of action, freedom of emotion, to allow our impulses, emotions and thoughts to run wild without any control. By not controlling them, we just foment them. Anything is good, you may think. There is freedom of thought, so let us do whatever we like. You can do that, but you will come to a dangerous pass.

Here I would not say what are the ethical virtues. I might say, do whatever you like; but the moment you find that it gives you trouble, try to control that, don't go that way. Learn by your experience. There are different subtle arguments about ethics —what is right, what is good, and so on. People talk of 'situational ethics', judging what should or should not be done independently, according to situations. This means that according to the situation you

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can do anything you like. Yes, I leave it to you: whenever you find that a certain kind of behaviour creates trouble for you, try to go in the opposite direction. Then you will realize that certain kinds of behaviour are considered to be ethical because people have found through experience in their personal lives that those things conduce to their happiness. People who came to this world before us found out that certain modes of conduct are good—that is, helpful; others are bad, or unhelpful. In this way traditions grew. And there are some standard attitudes and modes of conduct which are universally accepted as ethical virtues. But when you find it difficult to put them into practice, you may be tempted to intellectualize them away. You can do that, but you will not get peace of mind that way. You will not be able to control your mind, or meditate, or develop your spiritual life. That is the difficulty. The choice is up to you.

But how can one control inimical thoughts and desires when they come into the mind? One general rule is, when undesirable thoughts and feelings come, just think of the

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opposite. That is the one general principle which is applicable in all circumstances. For instance, when you have the impulse to be angry, try to be loving. When you feel hatred for someone, try to think in terms of sympathy. Remember that even in that person is the divine, as much as it is within you. And remember that the hatred and anger that you see in others are simply the outer garments of the divine reality which is within everyone. So try to project sympathy, try to project love.

There is a very popular Buddhist teaching, from the *Dhammapada*—it is also found in Hindu scriptures—

‘Conquer hatred by love;
Conquer niggardliness by generosity;
Conquer dishonesty by your overflowing honesty;

Conquer falsehood by your truthfulness.’

These practices are extremely helpful. In all religions, more or less, these things are taught. Christ put it very poetically:

‘Love your enemies,
Bless them that curse you,
Do good to them that hate you,

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And pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.'

When you cannot do anything outwardly for those who are against you, just pray for them. This is so practical, so real. These are the basic ethical principles, I would say, of all religions. Mohammed said, 'Be free from malice from morn till night, from night till morning.' One can base one's whole spiritual life on the practice of this one ethical virtue.

There is a Buddhist meditation, also a Vedic meditation—in Buddhism there are very few things which do not come from the Upanishads: 'Send thoughts of goodwill to the east, to the west, to the north, and to the south.' There is nothing complicated about this. If you can practise it for a period, you will get great peace. If you can do it regularly for one year, I am sure your life will take a different turn. Of course, you must try to live these thoughts throughout the day. It won't do to meditate on this idea and then forget all about it and behave in just the opposite way. You will find it difficult to put this into practice. It is easier to think about it for the time being, and even

then other thoughts will come. But in spite of that, if you persist, I am sure that in the course of one year, perhaps much earlier, your outlook will become different, you will get tangible results. You will be more tolerant of others, you will have greater sympathy, you will have pl acidity of mind. When you have pl acidity of mind, then comes energy, then comes control of mind, then you get the requisite strength for meditation.

And you become cheerful. You see, one of the indications that one is progressing in spiritual life is cheerfulness. Blessed are the cheerful, taught Swami Vivekananda. Surely Christ meant the same thing when he taught — ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.’ The first indication that you are progressing in your spiritual life will be cheerfulness; spontaneous, unalloyed cheerfulness, which is born of purity of heart.

Sometimes people criticize those who live spiritual lives. Because they are found to be cheerful, some people think they live idle, care-free lives. Once a swami of our order, a disciple of Ramakrishna, was travelling by train. He

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was a very unassuming person, not at all like Swami Vivekananda. As he was travelling, a rich and important-looking man said to him, 'You people live a luxurious, idle life. That is why you are so cheerful.' The swami replied, 'Well, why don't you come and join us? Our life is open to all. You are welcome to become one of us.' But such persons will not do that, they will just criticize. So, the first indication of spiritual progress is that one becomes cheerful. And that you can get even by this simple process of meditation, if you really want it.

But what is the purpose of your meditation? The purpose must be clear. Some want to meditate to get control of their minds, and at the same time want to enjoy the things of the world. They want to develop the power of concentration and then utilize that for the fulfilment of their worldly ambitions. No wonder many persons who try to meditate go wrong. They begin to see visions, they begin to feel God-consciousness! They feel the *Kundalini* rising from one centre to another! No wonder! They lead a wild life and practise meditation haphazardly without getting any

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personal instruction. Some persons read all sorts of books and on the basis of them they begin to meditate. Naturally such persons go out of mind.

Once when I was new in this country, perhaps within a month of my coming, a young man who attended one of our services asked me as he was going out, 'Are you trained to give instruction in meditation?' I said, 'Why do you ask that question?' and did not give any answer. Anyhow, he came to see me once or twice. He showed a genuine interest in spiritual things. Then he left here and went to Chicago. He wrote me one or two letters. In one letter he said he was meditating for eight hours or so every day. I was new to America, and I did not know how people think. From a distance one cannot understand. I felt very happy that one person was trying to live an intense spiritual life. Then after a year he came to me and said he had been in a mental hospital. I asked him what had happened. He said, 'One day I was walking along a street when I saw a display window full of toys. I saw that the toys were dancing. Then I lost conscious-

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ness. Afterwards I found I was in the custody of the police. They took me to a mental hospital.' Just think, he was a nice boy but was going about things in the wrong way.

So you cannot just sit for meditation and think that your *Kundalini* is rising. You must cultivate ethical virtues. You must live a disciplined life. Perhaps 'discipline' is a strong word—I would say, live a life of sensible moderation. Do what you know to be right. Learn from your own experience. As I said before, if a certain type of conduct gives you trouble, don't do it again. In this way, your life will become regulated. It is extremely important to live an ethical life. If you live ethically, unselfishness will grow in you; to a great extent your mind will come under control. This is called purification of the heart. Ramakrishna said, 'If one becomes unselfish, then he is fit to realize God.' Swami Vivekananda went farther; he said, 'Unselfishness is God.'

It is easy to practise. Each day, miss no opportunity to serve others, to think in terms of 'not I, but Thou'. For the time being, you need not think difficult things like, 'Oh God, I am

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nothing, Thou art everything. Not I, but Thou.' In your daily life, just practise service to others. Think in terms of the convenience of others, the feelings of others. Don't say, 'He has treated me unjustly.' Don't say, 'I want this.' Just see what the other person wants. It is necessary for one's spiritual growth to cultivate this attitude.

Some persons are born with sympathy for others; they spontaneously think in terms of others. One swami whom I know comes to mind. Even when he was young, I noticed that he had a genuine spirit of service, he was always eager to help others. Nowadays he is doing a very big work.

When you develop a certain degree of unselfishness, the question will come into your mind: what is the purpose of life? Then spiritual interest will arise. Without spiritual interest you cannot meditate. With only a feeble interest you cannot do anything. Finding your life empty, you seek something in a casual way. You think that by meditating you will find life meaningful. You will find that, I am sure, but you must follow a definite process of meditation. You cannot do it haphazardly.

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Many persons do not like to think that they need a spiritual teacher. But in most cases a spiritual teacher is necessary, as a safe guide. However, you must find a qualified person, who teaches out of compassion, out of a desire to help others, and not for name, fame, money or any other worldly goods. When you get such a spiritual teacher, then you know that you are comparatively safe. Even if he is not a man of God, at least he knows the difficulties on the way. He knows what happens in spiritual life, the problems and the advantages. It is extremely necessary for the average person to have a teacher.

And if you are fortunate enough to find a teacher who is a real man of God, who has had genuine spiritual experiences, that is indeed a great blessing. Not only can he give you spiritual advice; such a teacher can read your mind, can read your thoughts. Not in a mystical or occult way. I was fortunate to come into contact with a saint who told me that there was a time when he could see what was in the heart of a person as clearly as one sees objects in a glass case. That was the first time I heard such

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an astounding statement from one whom I could not disbelieve. He did not say this to show his power, but in passing, while talking about something else. But don't think that every yogi in the streets of New York will be able to do that. Most of those who claim such powers are charlatans. Watch their lives before you believe their words. In any case, if you get a competent spiritual guide, that is extremely helpful.

Then the first question is, what is the purpose of your meditation? Why do you want to meditate? You must have a spiritual purpose; there must be spiritual interest. Otherwise there will be a conflict. If your real interest is in something else, but you want to meditate for eight hours a day, that is a dangerous thing. I would not ask anybody to meditate for more than five minutes in the beginning. Spiritual interest must be aroused. The field must be ploughed, the soil must be made ready. Otherwise real results will not come. Your mind will grow all sorts of weeds, and they will be dangerous for your life.

Meditation means concentration. What is the law of concentration? It is very simple. The

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law of concentration is interest. When you become very much engrossed in reading, you forget your dinner, you do not even notice other persons coming into your room. What is the reason? Your interest is there, and so your mind becomes absorbed. In the same way, interest must first be aroused before one can meditate. For that, all these preparations—living a regulated life, practising ethical disciplines, performing unselfish service, and so on—are necessary.

When one has spiritual interest, of whatever type that may be, then the question arises: what should be one's object of meditation? The object of meditation can be God with form or God without form. Some persons who are a bit proud of their intellect, of their rationality, will say, 'We believe in God without form.' That is all right, but if you are to worship God without form you must have tremendous will power. You must be able to do what you are asked to do, especially with regard to ethical virtues. Buddha did not speak of God, but he had tremendous will power with which to gain self-mastery. Not many persons have that

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tremendous will power. Only those persons who have developed their will power to a high degree can worship God without form. In such worship there is absolutely no human touch, no emotional support. You simply find out intellectually what is right and try to put that into practice, without any help.

Even those monks who follow the monistic path of spiritual practice usually have the help of their *guru* and look to him for support. Buddha's disciples did this. As far as we know, Buddha himself did not do this. But when he asked his disciples to meditate as he had, they could not. In times of trouble they began to pray to Buddha himself. So there came the threefold prayer:

'I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in his teachings,
I take refuge in the holy company of Bud-
dhist monks.'

This prayer, such an attitude is there to help one in times of trouble. Such helps are necessary. Those who want to meditate on God without form from the very beginning, find that they cannot. Surely they cannot. Even

Swami Vivekananda, who was such a strong person, said in hours of trial and tribulation, 'I want a visible form, a flesh and blood reality who can help me!' That is necessary when the mind begins to give trouble. Let those who are qualified, meditate on God without form. Know for certain, their number is very few. However, if you are proud of your intellectual qualifications, your rational outlook, and do not believe in 'emotionalism', that is all right. Just go in your own way, and learn from experience.

Then let us consider God with form and qualities. Here also there is a difficulty. In India there are so many gods and goddesses—three hundred and thirty million gods and goddesses, it is said. But these deities are not simply images. They are the various readings of the same Reality through human intellect and human emotions. There is a great deal of discussion nowadays: God is no longer needed, God has become outmoded, 'God is the fading smile of a Cheshire Cat', and so on. But God is not dead. Your idea about God was wrong. The Personal God is a concession to

human weakness. Reason always quarrelled with the Personal God. The Personal God is not a separate entity. The Personal God is the human reading of the Impersonal God. Philosophically, God is oneness, ultimate reality. But when you as a human being try to conceive of that ultimate reality with your human mind and human emotions, your idea will be of a human God. Because we human beings sometimes create things, we think of God also as a creator. And as soon as you say God is Creator, other ideas come in: God is Father, God is Mother; and why not Friend or Companion, too?

When we try to meditate on God as a Person, there is also another difficulty. We need a concrete form on which to concentrate the mind. So in Hinduism there are different forms. These forms symbolize various ideas. For example, Śiva is the symbol of renunciation, the God of monks. If you have an idea of the form of Śiva you meditate on that. Or, say, Buddha. Buddha did not leave any photographs. But there are so many statues of Buddha, statues created with human imagination, with human

emotions. The early Buddhists did not even believe in God, not to speak of God with form. But Buddha became the substitute for God. Out of their human need, Buddha's followers began to meditate on Buddha. And they were not satisfied with just meditating on him. They built innumerable temples where they worshipped him with elaborate rituals and big statues. Their love for Buddha was so great that they wanted to have huge statues of him on which to meditate. Even nowadays many people meditate on the form of Buddha—not only Buddhists, but others also. The Buddha form gives so much peace in our room when we keep the statue there.

So it comes to this: when you cannot worship the Impersonal God, then worship God with qualities, as Creator and so on. If that also is too difficult, then worship with the help of a form. And so we come to Buddha and Christ and Krishna to the idea of divine incarnation. We have no interest in going into the definition of divine incarnation. But there are certain persons who are spiritually so powerful that they are above all ordinary saints. In any

case, what you think, you become. Patanjali says in his *Yoga Aphorisms*: 'If you meditate on a highly developed spiritual person, you will get great benefit; you can get even the highest *samādhi*.' Taking the form of a great soul as a symbol, you can use that as a help to meditation.

But meditation is not simply worshipping a beautiful form. You may meditate on a good picture; that will not give real benefit. It might be a bit helpful in the beginning, but you cannot proceed farther. When you think of Buddha, you think not only of his form; you contemplate his life and teachings. In this way, emotion comes, and emotion helps you to develop interest in him. When interest has been aroused, it becomes easy to meditate.

It is not a question of belief or non-belief in the incarnation of God. You feel attracted to a spiritually powerful person. He has given help to so many persons. So you begin to worship him spontaneously. If this does not appeal to you, you will find another method. Or, through your efforts you will find the difficulty of meditating without some tangible guide.

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Even then you may not necessarily meditate on a form, on a statue, or a picture. There are other ways.

You can meditate on the life-incidents of great souls. That is easy. Vaishnavas, followers of Krishna meditate on events in the life of Krishna. I think some Christians meditate on the life-incidents of Christ. It is a great help, indirectly, a very great and tangible help. When you meditate on the life-incidents of great souls, you come into their presence, as it were, emotionally and with concentration. Or, with interest, let us say, rather than concentration. Concentration comes only after interest has grown. Then you feel their living presence. It is as good as living in their time.

'M.', the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* followed this method of spiritual practice. When he went to Dakshineswar to see Ramakrishna he would write down his experiences in short notes. Because he was a professor, he could not usually go to Ramakrishna except on weekends. He would read over his notes to stimulate his memory, and so would meditate on those ideas. This practice

had become such a habit with him that even after Ramakrishna passed away, 'M.' lived and moved and had his being in that presence. Ask him any question, and his mind would go to Dakshineswar. When we saw him, many years after Ramakrishna passed away, we could see, just from the expression of his eyes, that his mind was in the constant presence of Ramakrishna. I have read that once 'M.' went to Dakshineswar and began to embrace the big trees there. He said, 'These trees saw Ramakrishna for thirty years.' 'M.' was not sentimental by nature. But in his imagination those trees were so much associated with the presence of Ramakrishna that he began to embrace them. Think of the intensity of his devotion! For him meditation was easy; it was a constant companion. But his spiritual unfoldment came by contemplating incidents in the life of a great soul, Ramakrishna.

Another method is to meditate on the teachings of great souls. If you read and meditate on those ideas from day to day, they will sink into your mind. They will create a change in your outlook. 'What you eat, you become.'

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The food you give to your mind will take possession of your mind. Afterwards these thoughts will be put into action. From your thoughts actions will come spontaneously. So meditating on the teachings of men of God is very helpful. It is relatively easy. You contemplate certain ideas. You think and think on those ideas; you begin to visualize them. Then afterwards you will find new meaning in the teachings. When you read them for the first time, you find one meaning. But as you meditate on them from day to day and try to put them into practice, you will find deeper and deeper meaning. That is extremely important. Five minutes of meditation a day seems like nothing, but when you try to put those ideas into practice, those five minutes will be of untold help to you.

A similar method is to take a text from a spiritual book which appeals to you, meditate on those ideas and try to put them into practice. As you do this from day to day, you will find that text just like an algebraic formula. The formula itself is just a little thing, but it is the clue by which one can do big things. With that formula an engineer can build big bridges.

Through spiritual practice you will find how helpful the scriptures are.

Another form of meditation is to try to think that God is all-pervading, that God dwells in the heart of everyone.

What happens when one meditates? Mind becomes stable, calm. You may not at once be in *samādhi*, after struggling for one hour. But if you practice for some time, surely you will get one or two minutes of calmness. If your mind is calm for one or two minutes, that is a great thing. Instead of the waves of thought constantly agitating your mind, the mind has become calm; at least for the time being there is a lull. That indicates that you are progressing. That is a great thing. And if you continue, you will progress more and more.

Then, there are different levels of meditation. Patanjali's Yoga book gives a detailed description of these things. But there is no use in telling the details, no use even in reading about them. In a general way, what happens is this: First, you develop interest by cultivating ethical virtues and trying to put them into practice. Your mind becomes placid, you become

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sympathetic, you do not get disturbed so easily. Afterwards, when interest has developed, there will come energy for meditation. You will develop the capacity to meditate. And when you have developed the capacity to meditate, you will have more and more concentration. And when concentration is complete, you will get what is called the transcendental experience. It will come only then.

Don't think that as soon as you try to meditate you will have transcendental experience. We found the words 'transcendental experience' very much bandied about sometime back. It does not come so easily. You see, if you want anything worth having, you must pay the price for it. Do not think you can find a short cut to everything. There is no short cut, there is no jet-plane way for controlling the mind. It is necessarily a slow process. You must be ready for that. But do not say, at the very beginning, 'Oh, it is such a long way off! ' As soon as you hear that religion requires effort and discipline, you complain that the goal is a long way off. Then do not come that way. Go after what is cheap and easy.

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In Calcutta there was once an English watch repairman. Because he was English, Indians sometimes would not like to give him a high price for repairs. He could be humorous at times. Once a man brought in his watch to have it repaired, but was unwilling to pay much. On inspection, the Englishman found that the watch had previously been given to some workman who had spoiled it. When the customer complained, the Englishman said, 'Go to a cobbler, don't come to a watch repairman.'

So, in exactly the same way, you want the highest Truth and you complain that it is a long, long journey. Your very complaining indicates that you do not really want that Truth. The spiritual path may not necessarily be a long journey. What is necessary is to make a beginning, to take one step. If you are not even ready to make a beginning, then you have no interest. When your ship is caught in a serious storm, any port is good enough. When you are hungry, any food is good. But when your interest is not keen, then you say the goal is a long way off. With such an attitude, one cannot do anything.

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The goal is not always a long way off. All these processes of spiritual discipline seem to be very complicated; but spiritual life is not necessarily complicated. Patanjali's Yoga book gives subtle descriptions of many things we cannot understand; or, perhaps, we can understand the words, but it is very difficult to understand the meaning. To understand what he says, we have to pass through all those conditions of mind; then we can really understand. But even Patanjali, after giving all these descriptions of what happens, and what has to be done, all of a sudden says: 'You can also realize God through love for Him.' Then it is easy. Simply by loving God, all the impurities of your heart will be burned away, will be eliminated. Then you will realize Him as a direct experience. You do not have to go through complicated processes of meditation. Simply through love for God you can get the result. Three or four times Patanjali speaks in that vein. In another aphorism he says, 'If you repeat the name of the Lord, you will be able to realize Him.' Simply by repeating the name of the Lord, there will come a time when one will

realize Him as a tangible experience. One commentator said, 'Not only can you realize Him, you can see Him and hear Him talk.' Ramakrishna said about his experience of the Divine Mother, 'She talks to me.' Ramakrishna, living in modern times, proved the truth of these statements.

Swami Turiyananda practised many hard and complicated forms of spiritual discipline. Sometimes he would spend the whole day and night in meditation. He had a strong body and great will power, and so he could do that. But towards the end, when he would be giving directions to others, he would say that there are easier methods. Quoting that aphorism of Patanjali, he would say, 'A lover of God, one who has been able to develop love for God, has not to go through all these complicated processes. Simply by love for God he will get everything. God will help him.'

God helps in other cases also. The Self within us is trying to manifest Itself. Through meditation we help that process. The Self is always trying to unfold Itself, and through spiritual discipline Its unfoldment becomes

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quicker. Through devotion to God you will realize the Self quicker.

But the important thing necessary is constant fearless practice. As Patanjali says, 'The Self can be known through spiritual practice and discrimination between what is right and what is wrong.' Always be alert to discriminate between right and wrong. And persevere in your spiritual practice. Not that you will have to do it for long hours. As a practical matter, do it for a short time. Do it for a very short time, but do it every day for a long period, say, three or four years. If you pursue it that way, interest will grow. You will be able to meditate for a longer time. Then you will develop intensity of love for God. As intensity of devotion increases, you will be able to meditate for longer and longer periods. Afterwards you will realize the truth of your self, the knowledge of what you are. That means God-vision, illumination, realization of ultimate reality, eternal knowledge and eternal bliss.

THE MOOD FOR MEDITATION*

Meditation is a state of inner absorption in which the mind of the meditator flows continuously and spontaneously toward the object of meditation. The *Bhagavad Gītā* compares this inner absorption to the steady flame of a lamp sheltered in a windless place. Patanjali describes this state as the unbroken flow of the whole mind toward the object of concentration (*pratyakatānatā dhyānam*). According to the *Srimad Bhāgavatam* this is a state in which the meditator becomes one with

* *Prabuddha Bharata*, March–April 1980.

the object meditated upon. Rāmānuja considers this state as a spontaneous and loving remembrance of the most beloved (*dhruvā smṛiti*).

The state of meditation is reached by a process of gradual devolution, or folding oneself back. The speech is folded back into the mind, the mind into the intellect, and the intellect into the indwelling Self. Meditation culminates in the state of samādhi, in which the individualized consciousness, or microcosm, becomes completely merged in the infinite expanse of absolute and all-pervading pure Consciousness, the macrocosm. It is like a piece of ice slowly getting dissolved in the water of the ocean. The *Māndukya Upaniṣad* speaks of the three states of our existence—waking, dream and dreamless sleep. Beyond these three there is another state, which the same Upanishad describes as *turiya*, or the fourth. The state of samādhi is the state of *turiya* and the state of *turiya* is reached by transcending the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep. The goal of meditation is to achieve this transcendence consciously and voluntarily.

Meditation, as a spiritual discipline, has three aspects: the object of meditation, the act of meditation, and the meditator. As absorption in meditation deepens, the three aspects begin to coalesce into one. Vedanta philosophy describes this culmination as *triputivilaya*, or mergence of the three into one.

Meditation is not just one of the many spiritual practices; it is the culmination and consummation of all spiritual practices, irrespective of the meditator's philosophy and creed. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: 'The *sandhyā* merges in the *gāyatrī*, the *gāyatrī* in Om, and Om in *samādhi*.' That is to say, ritualistic worship and prayer merge in the *gāyatrī* which is the highest and most concentrated prayer of the Vedas. The *gāyatrī* then becomes further concentrated into the sacred word Om, from which all words emanate; and, finally, Om merges in the profound silence of *samādhi*. It is not that the meditator attains to the state of meditation. It is rather the other way; he is taken over by that state. As a weary person is taken over by the state of deep sleep in spite of his best efforts to remain awake,

even so, the aspirant weary of the unsubstantiality of the world, is taken over by the state of samādhi, the boundless and fathomless ocean of silence.

The depth of inner absorption is measured by the intensity of each of the following three kinds of spontaneous transcendence: Firstly, the meditator, as he loses himself in the state of inner absorption transcends the idea of time, and, therefore, becomes oblivious of the lapse of time. Secondly, he transcends the idea of place and is not aware of the surrounding environment. And thirdly, he completely transcends his 'I' consciousness and, therefore, everything about himself. This inner absorption cannot be attained in a single day; it cannot be programmed, hastened, or scheduled. It is not dependent on specific posture, diet, duration of sitting, or any other factor accessory to the practice of meditation. That which is most vital is the meditative mood. The aspirant must feel the mood for meditation. Sri Ramakrishna describes this spiritual mood as a kind of divine inebriation. No meditation is possible without this inebriation.

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The favourable and unfavourable moods

An ordinary person experiences many moods and he is at the mercy of them. His moods are diverse and variable, and he has no control over them. All his thoughts and perceptions, cognitions and volitions, are greatly and variously charged by these moods. The *Bhagavad Gitā* broadly classifies the different moods into three categories and they are: *sāttvika*, *rājasika* and *tāmasika*. The *tāmasika* and *rājasika* moods are not favourable for meditation. The first one, the *tāmasika* mood, darkens the mind and forces it to lapse into the state of inertia, which is the opposite of contemplative alertness. The second one, the *rājasika* mood, brings in its wake turbulence and restlessness, which make the mind unfit for any meditative endeavour. The third variety of mood, the *sāttvika* one, is a mood of tranquillity and detachment, and, therefore, is the most favourable mood for the practice of meditation.

Different aspirants experience different degrees of the contemplative mood, depending upon their respective inner

disposition and self-control. Therefore, aspirants have been classified into four categories: the beginners, the striving, the adept, and the perfect. Those who are perfect in meditation always remain absorbed in a contemplative mood, irrespective of time, place and circumstances. The adept aspirants can call forth this mood from their mind without much difficulty whenever they will to do so. The striving ones are able to experience this mood only under favourable circumstances and conditions; but those who are beginners are very much dependent upon the favourable disposition of their mind. The practice of meditation for beginners is not always inspired by any contemplative mood and, therefore, their practices frequently prove to be dry, monotonous, and mechanical. Even when they feel in a favourable mood, that too proves to be very shortlived and unsteady. Lacking stability in the proper mood, they fail to participate emotionally in their practices and very often are filled with a sense of frustration.

The meditative mood for a beginner is generally influenced by the following factors:

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place, time, surrounding environment, sights and sounds, speech, company, diet, physical conditions, feeling of dispassion, steadiness of practice, one-pointed loyalty to his Ideal, and his motive for meditation. Therefore beginners, until they have developed an inner mood that is strong enough to overcome external distractions, must depend upon circumstances favourable to their practices.

The cultivation of the right mood

The conditions which contribute to the cultivation and development of the meditative mood are said to be the following: (i) right living place; (ii) propitious time; (iii) congenial environment; (iv) favourable physical conditions; (v) holy company; (vi) right speech; (vii) purity of diet; (viii) right method; (ix) one-pointed loyalty to the Ideal; (x) right motive; (xi) acts of service; (xii) practice of discrimination, (xiii) devotional music; (xiv) practice of *prāṇāyāma*; (xv) study and chanting of sacred scriptures; (xvi) regularity and balance of practice; (xvii) ritualistic practice; and (xviii) japa,

or practice of the repetition of a holy name.

(i) *Right living place:* Place plays a vital role in the development of the meditative mood. It is easy for a beginner to feel the mood for meditation in a solitary place, away from the distractions of the world. Meditation, according to the traditions of yoga, is to be practised in solitude. A beginner especially is required to isolate himself from the preoccupations of everyday life and retire into solitude from time to time. Physical withdrawal from objects of distraction eventually leads to the withdrawal of the mind from such things. It is extremely difficult to devote one's mind to meditation by living in proximity of things which are disturbing and distracting, and therefore inner solitude must be sought in the solitude of nature.

Accustomed to living in the midst of the bustle of everyday life, many, however, find it difficult to live in solitude, enjoy its silence, and derive spiritual benefit thereby. For them external solitude often proves to be suffocating and oppressive. Therefore a beginner is advised to go into solitude occasionally for short periods, for example one or two days at

a time, and gradually to extend such durations of living in solitude. Solitude, as Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, points out, deepens one's spiritual mood: 'If you practice spiritual disciplines for sometime in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big not even cows and goats can injure it.'

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: 'To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.' Meditation is to be practised in secret and in solitude, and Sri Ramakrishna indicates three solitary places which are appropriate for this purpose: the inner recess of one's own mind, some secluded corner of one's own house, and the solitude of the forest. The beginner is advised to select for his practice any or all of these places, according to the opportunities available to him. Under any circumstances he must seek solitude for his practice until he has developed his inner solitude. Living in solitude calms the

mind. It has been said that distracting things and situations which are out of sight also tend to drop from the mind. The practice of withdrawal into solitude, however, must be backed up by a spirit of dispassion and prayerfulness, in the absence of which a beginner is likely to be taken over by a holiday mood instead of a meditative one.

(ii) *Congenial environment:* Congenial environment is a powerful aid in creating the mood for meditation. The environment, in order to be congenial, must be tranquil, far from the haunts of the worldly-minded, pure, and pleasant to the sight. According to the Hindu scriptures, the places which are favourable for the practice of meditation are the following: a mountain; a river bank; a temple; a place where the practice of meditation has been successfully carried out by many spiritual seekers; and a solitary place free from ferocious animals and other distractions. The yogi should always live alone. As stated in the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, where many dwell in one place there is the possibility of noise and quarrelling. Even where there are only two people there is the

possibility of harmful gossip. Therefore, the yogi should live in solitude and be alone. By living in solitude and being alone, the yogi gradually overcomes the tumult of the external world and by the repeated practice of meditation, he eventually rises above the distracting vibrations of his own mind. The state of meditation is achieved when the heart becomes tranquil. When one is no longer stirred by desires, one attains tranquillity of heart which has been likened to the stillness of a fire that is no more being fed by any fuel.

The environment selected for the practice of meditation must not merely be solitary; it must also be pure. An environment which is not clean and where holy persons are not honoured and adored, is not to be considered as pure and is, therefore, not conducive to the practice of meditation. The purity of an environment depends upon the purity of its spiritual vibrations. The sacred traditions of yoga mention that every person is constantly emitting, as it were, some subtle essence of his personality, known as *tanmātra* which remains present in the environment where a person

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lives or spends much of his time. The environment of a temple, or a place of worship or pilgrimage, is naturally pure because of the accumulated deposits of spiritual vibrations and, therefore, such a place is regarded as most congenial for the practice of meditation.

Swami Vivekananda emphasizes the need of a congenial environment and observes the following: 'Those of you who can afford it should have a room where you can practise alone. Do not sleep in that room; it must be kept holy. You must not enter the room until you have bathed and are perfectly clean in body and mind. Place flowers in that room always—they are the best surroundings for a yogi—and pictures that are pleasing. Burn incense morning and evening. Have no quarrel or anger or unholy thought in that room. Only allow those persons to enter it who are of the same thought as you. Then gradually there will be an atmosphere of holiness in the room, so that when you are miserable, sorrowful, or doubtful, or when your mind is disturbed, if you then enter the room you will feel inner peace. This was the real idea behind

the temple and the church; and in some temples and churches you will find it even now; but in the majority of them this idea has been lost. The fact is that by preserving spiritual vibrations in a place you make it holy.' It is traditionally believed that meditation should always be practised in a lonely spot, in dim light or in darkness. The ideal environment, however, is never given. The yogi must build his own inner environment by his own effort, so that he may remain unaffected by the distractions of the external world.

(iii) *Propitious time:* The meditative mood depends to a certain extent on the temper of the time selected for practice. The traditions of yoga consider the following periods of day and night as most propitious for the practice of meditation: (a) The conjunction of day and night; that is to say, at dawn and at dusk—when night disappears and day arrives and when day disappears and night arrives. (b) The moment of Brahman, which is an hour before sunrise. (c) Midday; that is to say, the conjunction of the two halves of the day. (d) Midnight, the conjunction of the two halves of the night.

The mind is said to remain collected and pure at those periods, because the spiritual current of the spinal column generally remains active and, secondly, breathing is done through both nostrils, which is the indication of inner tranquillity. At other times one or the other of the two nerves, *idā* and *pingalā*, on either side of the *sushumna* nerve, becomes active, quite in keeping with the heightened vibrations of nature, and, therefore, breathing is done through either the right or the left nostril, which indicates unsteadiness of mind. The yogi is often advised to observe carefully the *sushumna* nerve by keeping watch over the nature of his breathing to determine when he is breathing evenly through both nostrils, and to sit for meditation as soon as such moments arrive by throwing aside all activities. His mind, which is like a river, has its ebb tide and flow tide, particularly in the early stages of the practice of meditation. But such ebb and flow are overcome when the practice becomes regular and steady.

It is also said that in every place of pilgrimage there are special times each day when the

spiritual current flows throughout the surroundings, and practice of meditation at those times helps the aspirant in his absorption of the mind. According to the orthodox Hindu view, there are particular days which are especially auspicious for the practice of meditation and these are: new moon, full moon, the eighth day after the new or full moon, and days of special religious celebrations.

(iv) *Favourable physical condition:* The mood for meditation does not come if the physical condition of an aspirant is not favourable. Body and mind are closely related to each other and, therefore, when the body remains disturbed, the mind too becomes distracted. Meticulous care is very necessary to maintain the proper health of the body through regulated diet, exercise, and rest. Even a little over-eating or fasting or lack of sleep or any imbalance of the three elements of the body (bile, phlegm, and wind) makes the physical condition unfavourable for meditation. No effective practice of meditation is possible when the body is overtired through over-work or tense, or charged due to mental distractions. The body must be

healthy, rested, and free from tension. Steadiness of posture is an important prerequisite for the practice of meditation. An aspirant is advised not to overdo his practice when his physical condition is not favourable. The brain becomes overheated as the result of forced practice and on account of constantly sitting on the meditation rug.

A favourable physical condition, however, is dependent not just on proper diet, exercise, and rest, but also on purity of habits. The aspirant is required to be endowed with three gifts: (a) purity of character; (b) tenacity of purpose; and (c) strength of body. Without having the first, one cannot have the other two. One aspiring after the meditative mood must be careful not to overtax the body by over-eating or over-fasting or any form of over-indulgence. One who eats indiscriminately, lives a disordered existence, and is a slave to his passions and whims, is never capable of any tenacity of purpose. Such a person wastes half of his energy in digesting his food and even eight to ten hours of sleep is not enough to give him rest. Whatever energy is left is frittered away

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in idle gossip and aimless pursuits, leaving no energy whatsoever for the practice of meditation. Small wonder then that such persons feel no real mood to meditate, and even should they force themselves to sit for meditation, only yawn and doze.

(v) *Holy company:* There is nothing more powerful than holy company to uplift the depressed mind of a spiritual aspirant and infuse it with the fervour of the spiritual mood. There are times when an aspirant feels no enthusiasm or inspiration for his spiritual practices. For no apparent reason his mind suddenly comes up against an impenetrable wall, as it were, and everything appears to be dry, monotonous, and dull. No amount of study, or chanting of the holy name, or repeated attempts to concentrate his mind, is of any avail. All attempts to keep his mind from falling into the mire of low thoughts and tendencies prove futile and, as a consequence, he is overcome by a sense of frustration, despair, and defeat. Under these circumstances, the only remedy is the company of the holy. As a piece of red-hot iron radiates heat, so also the

holy personalities who remain charged with an intense spiritual mood emit great spiritual fervour, and an aspirant coming into association with such personalities is able to imbibe that mood from them. As evil company is contagious and stirs up the dormant evil tendencies in a mind, so also holy company easily awakens all the divine propensities in it.

The effectiveness of holy company, however, depends on the right attitude of an aspirant, and the factors which make for the right attitude are the following: First, an aspirant is required to have *śraddhā*, which is faith in himself and in holy company. The opposite of *śraddhā* is skepticism and cynicism, a general negative attitude about everything. The second factor is humility. As Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Water does not collect on a mound but only in low-lying places.' Similarly, the spiritual mood builds up only in a humble heart. One whose feeling of being afflicted is sincere blames no one but himself for his difficulties, and such a person alone is capable of being humble. There is no cure for a sick person until and unless he is tired of his sickness. The

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third factor is the spirit of service. An aspirant may seek the company of the holy but the holy personalities must be pleased with the sincerity of the aspirant. Holy company is more mental than physical. 'M', the chronicler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, beautifully highlights this idea and says that to see a holy man is itself holy company and a holy man is to be seen when he is absorbed in meditation.

(vi) *Right speech*: The growth of the mood for meditation is intimately related to the control of speech, which has been spoken of by Śankarāchārya as the first doorway to yoga. Too much talking or indulgence in fruitless controversy dissipates the energy of the mind and distracts it from its purpose, and, therefore, is inimical to the development of the meditative mood. Such control is necessary also for the preservation of the meditative mood. An average person cannot remain without talking even for a single moment. If there is no one to talk to, such a person talks to himself, that is, engages in a continuous inner monologue. Control of speech, however, is not forced silence; nor would such forced silence

be desirable or possible. It has been found that if a beginner takes a vow of silence for a day or two, he often indulges in too much talking after his observance of the period of silence has ended, and thereby makes his vow counter productive. Control of speech means making the speech right by saying that which is true, pleasing, and beneficial to all.

Meditation is the practice of silence and a person who has no control over his speech cannot practise this silence all of a sudden. Therefore a beginner is advised to develop the habit of practising *japa* or repetition of a holy name. Such repetition keeps the mind preoccupied with one single thought and creates a mood for meditative silence. *Japa*, practised mentally matures into contemplation; contemplation further strengthened takes the form of meditation; and meditation when it is effortless becomes the first stage of *samādhi*. *Vrittis*, or various thought-waves, cannot be stopped by suppressing them. They are to be first neutralized and then overcome by the deliberate cultivation of one single thought, which is accomplished by the practice of *japa*. The continuous

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repetition of a single thought makes its wave grow bigger and stronger, and thus subdues the countless smaller thought-ripples on the surface of the mind.

(vii) *Purity of food:* The influence of food over the mind cannot be exaggerated. The mood for meditation is greatly affected by the purity or impurity of food. Any food which is not consecrated or is contaminated by the touch of impure vibrations is considered impure and, therefore, is not conducive to a spiritual mood. Pure food purifies the blood and the mind. The *Bhagavad-Gitā* describes pure food as that which conduces to the rise of the *sattva guna*. The meditative mood comes only in the wake of the *sattva guna*. Contrary moods are of two types. They are either *rājasic*, exciting desire for worldly objects and enjoyments, or *tāmasic*, adding to the dullness and darkness of the mind. The rise of the *sattva guna* is possible only when an aspirant is able to ensure the purity of the following ten factors which are considered as nourishment for both body and mind: scriptures, or reading material; water, or what is drunk; people, or company;

place, which means a dwelling place; time, that is, propitious time; work, which means profession; birth, that is initiation into a specific path; meditation; *mantra*, or the holy word whch is repeated; and purification.

(viii) *Right method:* The meditative mood has been designated by some texts as *bhāva*, which is an emotional relationship with the Ideal of meditation. The state of *bhāva* is the intensified form of *bhakti* or sincere devotion. The aspirant must have love for his Ideal of meditation, and love comes only as a result of the commitment of the heart to the object of meditation. The aspirant's chosen Ideal of meditation must be compatible with his inner disposition and temperament. There are instances where an aspirant when asked to meditate on some Ideal which is impersonal does not feel any enthusiasm for such meditation; but the same person when advised to meditate on some aspect of the Godhead which is personal and has form feels great emotional fervour for his practice. Also, a beginner, who does not feel any mood for the practice of meditation when he is asked to fix

his mind on a concept or image or idea, may find great interest in ritualistic and devotional worship. The method of meditation must, therefore, be appropriate for an individual and in keeping with his heredity, temperament, and spiritual background.

(ix) *One-pointed loyalty*: One-pointed loyalty to the object of meditation is the most important condition for the cultivation of the meditative mood. Such one-pointed loyalty has been indicated by various scriptures as *nishthā*, which alone can give rise to *bhakti*, or love. *Bhakti*, when it matures becomes *bhāva*, or fervour and *bhāva* when it deepens becomes *bhāvanā*, which is a spontaneous loving remembrance. Rāmānuja designates this *bhāvanā* state as meditation. *Nishtha* is a conservative one-pointed loyalty which fosters and intensifies one's spiritual growth. Those who are liberal from the very beginning never grow. *Nishthā* is not a dogma or a narrowness of vision. It is not love for one's own Ideal by hatred toward other Ideals. An aspirant with true *nishthā* has love for all Ideals but keeps a special love and adoration for his own Ideal. A worshipper of

Krishna, when he goes to a temple of Šiva, for example, tries to visualize his Krishna, in the form of Šiva.

One-pointed loyalty helps the aspirant to develop a strong emotional relationship with the object of meditation and such emotional commitment alone can make the Ideal of meditation living. No meditative mood is possible unless the aspirant is able to have some definite idea that his object of meditation, whether personal or impersonal, is not just a picture or a form or a concept—but a living presence of the Divine within him. According to Patanjali, the state of meditation is reached when such meditation is practised continuously over a long period and with great love. No aspirant unless with an inborn gift, can hope to have this great love from the beginning; he has to cultivate love, and the way to cultivate it is to develop *nishthā* or one-pointed loyalty. Adherence to repeated practice, even though it appears to be mechanical in the beginning, in course of time gives rise to love for the Ideal, and one-pointed loyalty alone can make an aspirant adhere to his practice.

(x) *Acts of service*: The practice of meditation has its counterpart in the practice of service. The practice of seeing God with eyes closed must be supported by the effort to see God also with eyes open. What is realized in the depths of meditation must find its application in everyday life. Meditation and action always go together. Service to all beings by looking upon them as a reflecting medium of one's spiritual Ideal makes the practice of meditation spiritually positive and creative, and such spiritual creativity heightens the meditative mood in an aspirant. The practice of service is to do everything with an attitude of worshipfulness. Each act which the aspirant performs is required to be an offering to God. The two sides of the practice of meditation must, therefore, be properly aligned for the cultivation and development of the meditative mood.

(xi) *Right motive*: The mood for meditation is a manifestation of the spiritual emotions. Emotions, on the other hand, are inspired and guided by the intellect, which determines the motive behind all actions and emotions. As is

one's motive, so is one's mood; and as is one's mood, so is one's meditation. The motive is, therefore, a significant factor in arousing the mood for performing any action. In order to feel the mood for meditation, a spiritual motivation is necessary, because a spiritual motive alone can evoke spiritual fervour. The opposite of a spiritual motive is the worldly motive which always seeks to acquire or avoid something, and, therefore, meditation practised with such a desire is usually burdened with anxiety about the results of such practice. Spiritual motivation ensues from a spiritually inspired intellect which is firmly convinced about the spiritual goal to be pursued and also about the transitoriness of all worldly objects and enjoyments, here and hereafter. Practice of meditation, as the *Bhagavad-Gītā* points out, must be supported by the practice of dispassion. The aspirant is required to cultivate dispassion by repeatedly focussing his attention on the impermanence of all worldly enjoyments and the bitter disappointments which come in their wake. No real mood for meditation is possible unless one is

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imbued with the spirit of dispassion.

(xii) *Practice of discrimination:* An aspirant desiring the mood for meditation must be very discriminating in every respect. He is required to discriminate the real from the unreal, love of God from self-love, spiritual conversation from idle gossip, and his whims and emotions from his true spiritual aspirations. The aspirant has to evaluate all things from a spiritual point of view. Anything which is spiritually inspiring is desirable and anything which is not is to be considered undesirable. The guideline of evaluation for him is: 'Does it help me spiritually?' The contemplative mood can neither be developed nor maintained as long as the spiritual goal and everyday conduct are not aligned properly. Moreover, aspirants of meditation often manifest two types of behaviour: either they isolate themselves completely from the external world or they try to be too liberal and universal from the very beginning. Both are extreme behaviour and both bring remorse or reaction in the end. Discrimination is therefore very necessary at every step.

(xiii) *Devotional music:* Devotional music is

considered to be very effective in arousing the dormant spiritual emotions in us. Such music soothes the mind and serves as a spiritual diversion, by which spiritual aspirants detach themselves from the depressive thoughts to which they often cling unconsciously. Singing of devotional songs or listening to them is regarded as one of the supporting practices of meditation.

(xiv) *Chanting of the sacred texts:* Chanting of the sacred scriptures with proper intonation is considered by the traditions of yoga as a potent practice for the cultivation of the spiritual mood. Rhythmic chanting of such texts creates spiritual thought-waves within the mind and builds up the necessary mood for meditation. The sound of rhythmic chanting also creates thought-waves within the mind reminiscent of the spiritual goal. As the chanting continues for some time, such thought-waves gradually prevail over all other contrary thought-waves and evoke the mood for meditation.

(xv) *Ritualistic practices:* Practice of meditation varies from one individual to another,

depending upon the method a particular individual has chosen or which has been prescribed for him by a competent teacher. Each such method of meditation is related to certain specific ritualistic observances, which often form part of the practice of such meditation. The development of the mood for meditation is intimately associated with the performance of these ritualistic practices. Anything which an aspirant does regularly and repeatedly eventually becomes a ritual for him, and such rituals greatly help him to summon his spiritual mood. For example, one aspirant may sprinkle holy water before he sits for meditation, and by that he may feel the necessary mood for meditation, while another aspirant may find it easy to summon his spiritual mood by burning incense; and still others may like to chant a holy text in a rhythmic way for the same purpose. Each aspirant therefore, must develop his own ritualistic ways which are best suited for him, according to his inner conviction and disposition, and adhere to such practices scrupulously for the cultivation of his spiritual mood. In the absence of

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any such ritualistic observances, the practice of meditation becomes an altogether casual vocation, the effects of which often prove to be short-lived and even negative.

(xvi) *Regularity and balance of practice:* In order to develop the spiritual mood, one must subscribe to a particular method of meditation and be regular in one's practice. Practice becomes firmly grounded when it is followed for a long time, unremittingly and with devotion. Steadfast adherence to practice without any lapse is itself considered very significant, because even a lapse of one day can very well take the aspirant back to the position where he had been several days before. For a spiritual aspirant journeying toward his spiritual goal, there is no such thing as *status quo*. Either he must proceed or recede. By balance of practice is meant harmonious exertion and practice of moderation in every respect; it also indicates balance between meditation as a principal practice and other disciplines, such as worship, spiritual study, service, etc., which are its adjunct and supporting practices. The cultivation of the spiritual mood requires the

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participation of all the four faculties of the mind—willing, feeling, thinking, and acting—and, therefore, the aspirant's spiritual living must be such that all the four faculties develop harmoniously.

(xvii) *Prānāyāma*: *Prānāyāma*, or control of breath, is considered to be one of the means for evoking the mood for meditation. The flow of breath is an indicator of the mood of the mind. While evenness of the flow signifies a spiritual mood, its uneven nature indicates a contrary mood. According to the advocates of the yoga system of thought, the mood for meditation can be summoned by deliberately making the breath flow evenly. They contend that there is no use trying to convince a perverted mind about the efficacy of the spiritual goal, for the habits of the mind, which are chronically perverted, cannot be changed by reasoning and discrimination. Therefore, an aspirant is required to adopt means which are external to concentrate his mind, such as the practice of *prānāyāma*. But such practice of *prānāyāma*, when not supported by intense dispassion and purity of character, proves to be

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ineffective and mechanical and, therefore, positively harmful for the aspirant. As Swami Vivekananda has observed, the practice of *prānāyāma* without first being grounded on purity, renunciation, and worshipfulness, can lead to a nervous breakdown and even derangement of the brain. According to the *Yogavāśishtha Sāra*, one of the authoritative scriptures on yoga and Vedanta, of the four methods of evoking the meditative mood—holy company, practice of discrimination, eradication of desires, and *prānāyāma*, *prānāyāma* is regarded as the most drastic method and its practice can be justified only when all the other three methods have failed.

(xviii) *Japa*: *Japa* is the practice of the repetition of a holy name or a mystic syllable or word, which is chosen by the aspirant or which has been prescribed for him by a competent teacher. Such a word or syllable, when repeated with devotion and for a long time, becomes charged with spiritual consciousness and is a most powerful aid for the evocation of the mood for meditation. Such repetition may be audible, semi-audible, or silent, and an

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aspirant is instructed to concentrate his mind on the meaning of the word or syllable along with the repetition. When the practice of *japa* becomes continuous, it takes the form of meditation. The state of meditation is attained when concentration becomes effortless. Each *japa* or repetition is like the droplet of a new thought-wave which becomes deposited in the depths of mind, and as such thought-waves increase in number, they bubble up to the surface of the mind in the form of spontaneous remembrance, which is itself meditation. The practice of *japa* is therefore not only an aid for the cultivation of the meditative mood, but also a means to prolong such a mood and maintain it all the time.

In one of his songs, Ramprasad, the poet-saint of India, describes the spiritual mood as a form of divine inebriation and describes the nature of that inebriation in the following words: 'I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss, as I repeat my Mother Kālī's name; it so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk! First my guru gives molasses for the making of the Wine; my longing

is the ferment to transform it. Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then; and when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the *mantra*, taking the Mother's name to make it pure. Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad, and the four fruits of life are yours.' Thus an aspirant experiences a genuine spiritual mood only when he has tasted genuine spiritual bliss, which Ramprasad compares to the Wine of Everlasting Bliss. No one can drink this Wine of Everlasting Bliss unless he has prepared it for himself.

MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE*

I wish to speak to you about spiritual practice which we usually do. As a matter of fact, I am going to explain to you the steps that we have followed in our simple meditation.

We need clear ideas about spiritual life

First of all, it is essential on our part to hold before us the spiritual ideal clearly. Those of us who believe in the existence of the soul and the Ātman, those of us who believe in the existence of the Paramātman, the Soul of our souls, aspire to have our union with Him and,

**Prabuddha Bharata*, May and June 1971.

through Him, we aspire after the union with all of our fellow beings.

When as students, we approached the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, they placed before us the ideal of self-realization. By self-realization they did not mean anything exclusive. They told us clearly that the more you approach the supreme Spirit, the more you experience Him, the more you feel He is manifest in all, and then what follows is, you feel like serving the Lord in all. But, before that, one must try to follow the spiritual path through prayer and worship and get some clear conception of the nature of the deity who dwells in our heart, who dwells in you and in everyone.

Now since this is the ideal, the question arises: what path should we follow? And here too they placed before us the two-fold ideal of salvation and service. Work and worship should go hand in hand. Work is to be performed in the spirit of *karma-yoga*. We perform activities of various kinds, but we do not know how to do it, how to perform our duties, how to engage ourselves in various activities. They

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have to be done in a spirit of detachment and at first in a spirit of duty. Duty must be performed under all circumstances and then, as we advance, we feel we have to offer all the fruits of our work to the supreme Spirit who is the presiding deity of all forms of activities. Then there comes a time when we ask: why should we work? The answer is, for pleasing the Lord.¹ And there may yet come a time when we feel the divine presence permeating and interpenetrating us. Then we just become channels for the flow of divine power—the divine power that works for the good of mankind.

Be spiritually hungry

Just as work is to be done in the proper spirit, so also worship is to be performed in the right manner. All of us have to perform work of some kind or other. Work is compulsory, but the trouble is, worship is optional! Most of us do not feel inclined to do any worship, or *japa* or meditation, and that is the pity

1. विष्णु-प्रीति-कामनया ।

of it. If we be hungry spiritually we would like to take spiritual food. We feed our body, and we should feed the body with good healthy food. We feed our mind through our studies—the ideas should be good. Similarly we should feed the soul. How to do it? Through practice of worship—through the practice of *japa*, through the practice of meditation.

There is a parable of Sri Ramakrishna: The child was going to bed and said, 'Mummy, if I feel hungry, please wake me up', and the mother said, 'I am not to do that. Your hunger will wake you up.' There comes a time in the course of the evolution of the soul, when we do become spiritually hungry, and then we must have that type of food. I am reminded of a remarkable saying of the Holy Mother. Holy Mother said, 'Food-stuff is there, he who cooks food early would have his appetite appeased early.' Many of us are lazy, we do not want to cook at the proper time; maybe, we want to cook but late in the evening, and some are so lazy, they would rather starve than cook their food! Naturally, they feel miserable.

What Brahmananda said

When we try to sit quietly and try to do some form of worship, some form of *japa* or meditation, at the beginning we come across many obstacles. That is what Swami Brahmananda used to tell us. Here I will do a little reading from the *Eternal Companion*, the spiritual teachings of the Swami. He says:

'Practise *japa* and meditation regularly. Don't fail even for one day. The mind is like a spoiled child—always restless. Try to steady it again and again, by fixing it on the Chosen Ideal, and at last you will become absorbed in Him. If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady. In the beginning the practice of *japa* and meditation seems dry. It's like taking bitter medicine. You must forcibly pour the thought of God into your mind. As you persist you will be flooded with joy. What a terrible ordeal the student undergoes to pass his examination! Do you know that to realize

God is easier? Call on Him sincerely with a tranquil heart.'²

The disciple to whom he was speaking, said, 'At times I feel that with all my struggle I am making no progress. It all seems unreal. Despair takes hold of me.'

The Swami gave him hope:

'No, no. There is no cause for despair. The effect of meditation is inevitable. You are bound to get results if you practise *japa* with devotion, or even without it. For devotion will follow. Continue your practice regularly for a little longer. You will find peace. One's health also is improved if one meditates.'

'Meditation in the primary stage is like waging a war with the mind. With effort the restless mind has to be brought under control and placed at the feet of the Lord. But in the beginning, take care while you meditate, you do not overtax your brain. Go slowly. Gradually intensify your effort. Through regular

2. *The Eternal Companion*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1945, pp. 226-27.

practice, when the mind becomes steady, meditation will be easier. You will not feel any strain in sitting for long hours in contemplation.

'Just as after a deep sleep, a man feels refreshed in body and mind, so you will feel refreshed after meditation and there will follow an intense experience of happiness.

'Body and mind are closely related. When the body is disturbed, mind also becomes disturbed. Therefore, particular care must be taken as regards diet in order to keep the body healthy....

'Meditation is not such an easy matter. When you have eaten too much, the mind becomes restless. Also unless you keep lust, anger, greed, and such other passions under control, the mind will remain unsteady. How can you meditate with an unsteady mind ? . . .

'Unless you meditate, the mind cannot be controlled, and unless the mind is controlled, you cannot meditate. But if you think, "First let me control the mind and then I shall meditate," you will never enter the path of spiritual life. You must do both at the same time—

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steady your mind and meditate.

'As you sit down to meditate, think of the cravings and the desires of the mind as mere dreams. See them as unreal. They can never attach themselves to the mind. Feel that you are pure. Thus purity will gradually fill your mind....

'If you wish to realize God, practise the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance. In due course you will be enlightened.'³

When the supreme Being is realized, the illumined soul attains peace and blessedness and shares his peace and blessedness with his fellow-beings. That is the ideal the Swami held before us and he placed before us also the practice which we should follow with a view to realizing the ideal.

Early stages

As I said, when you wish to sit quietly, many types of disturbances arise in the mind. Sometimes, when you are not sitting for medi-

3. Ibid., pp. 227-30

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tation, you may feel an amount of calmness; but the moment you sit for meditation, specially at the beginning, mind becomes turbulent, body may be aching, the senses again may be running riot and no end of wild thoughts would be arising in the mind. *Japa* and meditation then becomes a great struggle but struggle has to be done.

The mystics of all religions place before us the ideal of, first of all, attaining minimum purity—purity of the body, purity of the senses, purity of the mind, and also purity of the ego. The body may be suffering from some disease. The different organs of the body do not coordinate, do not function properly, and again, our senses are all out-going, eager to come in touch with sense-objects. Our mind is swayed by desires, swayed by passion, and swayed by past impressions. And then again, there is another type of conflict in our mind. Our thinking goes one way, feeling goes a second way, will goes a third way and besides that our ego is perverse. To give an illustration: the little bubble thinks of itself too much. It forgets the other bubbles, it forgets even the ocean and wants to grow.

What happens ? The bubble bursts. And this actually happens with many human beings.

Now, let us not be terrified by all these troubles that appear before us. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, we find Arjuna complaining to the Lord: You speak of mental control, you speak of self-realization. Now I find my mind is most turbulent, I cannot control it.⁴ The Master recognized the difficulty of the student and with great sympathy and love, He said: Yes, what you say is right, but by following the proper means, through the practice of detachment, through constant meditation, this uncontrollable mind—which appears to be uncontrollable—can be controlled. Eventually one comes into touch with the supreme Spirit—the Soul of our souls, the Soul of the Universe.

Don't complain about environment

First of all, we complain too much about our environment. We really do not want to do anything except always complaining about the environment. Well, suppose we change the

4. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6. 33–34.

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environment—the same complaint will be there. We do not find anywhere an ideal environment—such a thing does not exist. You make this plea: 'Environment is not favourable—how can I practise meditation?' Well, right here you have to practise meditation. Do you not try to sleep in the midst of the most troublesome environment? Similarly you have to try to practise meditation whatever be the nature of the environment. How? By withdrawing ourselves from all the outside disturbances, just as we do before we fall into sleep. That is to be practised. Then again, we have our troubles inside. Maybe the body is diseased. Many a time we hear complaints: the moment we sit for meditation, we get headache. Well, 'meditation itself is a headache'. And so try to be healthy. That is why, Sri Krishna says at the beginning of the sixth chapter, the *Dhyānayoga*, that one must first of all lead a regulated life, in food, in sleep, in activities, and in rest.⁵ One should follow the middle path avoiding the extremes. This gives

5. *Bhagavad-Gitā*, 6. 17.

the spiritual seeker an amount of capacity to pursue his practice to follow the spiritual path.

Moral discipline

The teacher of yoga, Patanjali, is unwilling to give any instruction on *āsana* (posture) unless and until, to some extent, the spiritual seeker is established in what he calls *yama* and *niyama*. The spiritual seeker should practise *ahimsā*, should tell the truth, should not be greedy, should practise continence as much as possible, should not depend on others helplessly, should try to stand on one's own feet. And even that is not enough. He says that one should practise an amount of purity, external and internal. One should try to be contented, adapted to one's own environment as much as possible. One should practise discipline of the body, discipline of speech, discipline of the mind, and one should study the scriptures and assimilate the ideas. Even that is not enough. Egocentric activity is not good. One must try to surrender oneself completely to the supreme Spirit who, as the devotee later on discovers, is the Soul of his soul.

First of all, we come to regard God as the Power. Swami Brahmananda used to tell us, 'You can never be fully established in morality unless you believe in God.' By God he did not mean any extra-cosmic Being; and he said, first of all, we think of God as the Power who has brought this world into being, who sustains it, and who takes it back. As we progress, that power which we thought was outside, we find not only to be a Power but also a presence within, and advancing further the spiritual seeker sees, and feels, the presence of the Divine in all.

Some form of discipline is to be practised, so that our body may be trained to some extent. Then the senses are to be trained and also the mind. Not only that, the ego should also be trained.

Strengthen the body first

How do you train the body? Take care of food: avoid overeating and select the food that agrees with you, that conduces to the harmony of the body. Many people think eating food is the greatest exercise for the stomach! That is

not enough. Apart from eating healthy food, you must also have some exercise of all the limbs, specially some exercise of the stomach, so that your digestion, assimilation, and evacuation can be as good as possible. These are the rules, primary rules that are to be followed. That is why the ancient teachers said: 'The first *dharma* is to take care of the body.'⁶ That is, to have a good body, a sound body that is fit for the pursuit of spiritual life. I see sometimes weaklings coming and saying, 'I want to forget my body.' What bodies have they? Is it a body or what? A mass of flesh and bones! Develop the body properly.

Cultivate mental harmony

Sometimes they come and say, 'Swami, I want to forget all, my mind also.' What mind have they got? Swami Vivekananda used to have a pun on the word 'Manas'. In Bengali, we call it 'mon'. Now, 'mon' may be 'a maund' i.e. 80 lbs. And so, the Swami used to say, 'Has your mind got the weight of 80 pounds or only

6. शरीरमाद्यं खलु धर्मसाधनम् ।

a 'chatāk' (two ounces)? What sort of mind do you have?' So the mind is to be developed. Will is to be developed. Thoughts and feelings are to be developed. If there is a spiritual aspiration, everything becomes easy.

When you want to pass an examination,—perhaps not so much as we do (in India) for acquiring knowledge, for getting some appointment to maintain oneself and one's family—then what an amount of trouble you take! Here also, if we keep alive and bright before us the ideal, the spiritual ideal, everything becomes easy. All the trouble that we take would be worth taking.

Let us remind ourselves of the wonderful analogy we have in the Upanishads. The Upanishad says the body is a chariot, senses are like the horses, the mind is like the rein, intellect is like the charioteer, and the Ātman is the master of the chariot. As the chariot moves if some of the wheels come off and run away, can it proceed? The horses have become restive, turbulent. Control the horses and then make your rein tight. Let the master of the chariot ask the charioteer to be wide

awake. The master has gone to sleep, the charioteer has become drunk, the reins become slack, and then the horses are running wild; fortunately, there is no great disaster. So, before any disaster comes, let us be wide awake; let the master of the chariot be wide awake. Let him ask the charioteer to be alert and then, with the help of the mind, control the senses, direct the senses along the right path. Then the chariot will move properly.

But let us remember, none of us can suddenly attain perfection in spiritual disciplines. But minimum progress is necessary so that our body, mind, and the senses will be in a harmonious state. And the ego, the perverse ego, should be in a mood to come in touch with the cosmic will that lies behind our little will. When, to some extent, we have become established—remember, *to some extent*—in bringing about the harmony of the body first, bringing about the harmony in the mind, bringing about the harmony in our senses, and when we have succeeded in awakening the spiritual aspiration, when we have done this to some extent—then we may start with posture.

Posture (āsana)

Remember, after the practice of *Yama* and *Niyama* to some extent, Patanjali, the teacher of yoga, asks us to sit in a certain posture. What is the posture that we should choose ? The definition is: 'Posture is that which is firm and pleasant.'⁷ Select that posture in which you can sit steadily and in which you feel at ease. Some one may ask: May I lie down ? Well, you may lie down, and practise Āsana but you take an amount of risk: that posture is usually associated with sleep. By lying down and trying to practise meditation, you may not progress at all. You may have a little good nap and that may refresh you but will make you spiritually dull. 'Worship is possible in a sitting posture'⁸ that is what Vyāsa says. Sitting posture is better, but, take care, the relaxed posture in which you feel relaxed in body you should feel relaxed in mind also.

7. स्थिरसुखमासनम् । *Yoga-Sutras*, 2. 46.

8. आसीनः सम्भवात् । *Vedanta Sutras*, 4. 1. 7

Pray for all

After sitting, remember the Lord. He is our Ideal, He is the indwelling Spirit. He is inside and outside. You may chant a prayer. Be a little musical. Let your mind and your senses and the body vibrate with a little spiritual vibration. Then salute the Supreme Being. One great danger in spiritual life, when we follow a particular path, is that we are likely to be very, very fanatical. So here it is very good to salute not only the Supreme Spirit, but also salute the great teachers and the saints of all countries; salute the great teachers born in different parts of the country. What happens then ? The mind becomes broad.

Another danger in spiritual life is to be extremely selfish. Many a time, I have found, at least in the beginning of one's spiritual life, spiritual seekers think too much of themselves. They forget the others. So it is good to pray, not only for one's own welfare, but pray for the welfare of all. Just as you aspire after peace, you want to attain purity, you want to attain illumination, pray for the peace, purity, and

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enlightenment of everybody. Let all people move towards the Supreme Being. Let all people feel purity. Let all people feel illuminated. This prayer has a broadening effect.

Posture, salutation to the Supreme Being who is all-pervading and salutation to all the great teachers and prophets of the world—what will they do ? They will help in expanding our mind and expanding our consciousness to some extent and then we may proceed along the spiritual path.

Significance of breathing

A little practice of rhythmic breathing is very good. Breathe in—take a deep breath; breathe in and breathe out and you need not hold. But as I said, give suggestions to the mind: you breathe in purity, strength, and peace. The Infinite Being is the source of all purity, source of all strength, and source of all peace. As a matter of fact, in spiritual life, we cannot have enough of purity, cannot have enough of strength and peace: the more we get the better. Fill yourselves with the divine purity, divine strength and divine peace. Send forth currents of purity to every-

body. Have *maitri* (friendship) towards all: be friendly towards all. You will be surprised to find how easy it will be for you to rise to higher planes of consciousness if you have succeeded in cultivating this mood; and when we are in this mood, it is easy also to detach our senses from their objects. We are able to have a spirit of dispassion.

Spiritualize desires

The senses want to come in touch with the outer world. Control the senses; give the senses an inward turn as the Upanishadic seers did. Spiritualize the activities of the senses. As the Vedic prayer goes: 'O Gods, may we hear with our ears what is auspicious. O ye adorable ones, may we see with our eyes what is auspicious.'⁹ Hear what is good; hear, speak what is good; see what is good. Give a good direction to the senses. Let them be spiritualized. Now the mind is trying to run riot—how to calm the mind? All these desires and passions create troubles in the mind. At least when you

9. भद्रं कर्णेभिः सृण्याम देवाः भद्रं पश्येमाक्षभिर्जत्राः ।
Rig-Veda, 1. 89.8.

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are in a spiritual mood, when you are in a little expanded mood, think these are all distractions and they are your enemies. As Sri Ramakrishna tells us and told his disciples: 'Don't be afraid of lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and malice. Don't be afraid at all. Spiritualize them. Yearn to have the divine communion. Get angry with your anger. Get angry with all that stands in your way—not with people. Covet the Supreme Being who is the greatest wealth. If you want to feel proud, feel proud thinking you are a child of God, and so on.' Then what happens? All our desires are given a spiritual turn.

There is a wrong conception prevailing among a section of people. Some shallow psychologists say to spiritual aspirants: 'You are all suppressing or repressing your emotions.' We do not do anything of the kind. We want to store up the energy of our senses and mind. We want to direct this energy along the spiritual path. We want to sing the glory of the Lord. We want to visualize the form of the Supreme Being. We want to direct our senses inwardly so that there comes a time in the life of the spiritual seeker

when he comes to unfold new eyes for seeing the invisible, new ears for hearing the divine voice, or 'the music of the spheres'—the fun of all that is going on eternally. One is able to play with the divine Being; but all this is only on the way. We have to go further.

Body is a temple

In the analogy that you read in the Upanishad we referred to, the body is likened to a *ratha* or a chariot. Another analogy is that the body is a temple.¹⁰ That is a grand conception. In this temple, you find there is the devotee and also there is the Deity. You must be able to bring about the union of the two. But this temple is a very peculiar temple. Our little body is permeated and interpenetrated by our mental body or the subtle body. The subtle body again is interpenetrated and permeated by the *jivātman* (individual soul) and the *jīvātman* is part of the *Paramātman* (Supreme Soul). And as we succeed in making the body, subtle body, the senses, and the mind harmo-

10. देहो देवालयः प्रोक्तः ।

nious, we become more and more conscious of the divine light that shines within. So enter the sanctuary of the heart. Find that the heart is filled with the light of the Ātman and this light is a part of the Paramātman.

How to meditate

If you want to follow the formless meditation, merge your body, mind, the whole world and everything into God. Remember, you are just like a little sphere of light and the Supreme Being, the infinite sphere of light, as shining everywhere. But so long as we have the body consciousness and too much of the sense of personality, we cannot practise this meditation. So our teachers tell us: Now think your soul is putting on a pure subtle body, a pure mental body and a pure physical body, and the Infinite Spirit takes the form of the *ishta-devatā*, the ideal we worship.

Now meditate: In this Infinite Light which is also Infinite Love and Infinite Bliss, we have the devotee and we have the Deity. He is the embodiment of the Infinite Light, Infinite Love and Bliss. Repeat some appropriate divine

name and meditate on Him.

First of all, meditate on the blissful luminous form of the Supreme Spirit that we have chosen; meditate on His infinite purity, His infinite love, His infinite compassion, His infinite bliss. Then proceed further: meditate on the infinite consciousness which is His, in which He is, as it were, drowned.

What happens? As one goes on repeating the divine name and meditating on the Divine Being, moving from one aspect to another, a remarkable change takes place. Through moral practice we succeed, as I said, in establishing an amount of harmony; but the harmony that is established by repeating the divine name, the harmony that is established by thinking, by meditating, on the Lord, is of a superior kind. When real harmony is established in our mind, in our soul, in a spontaneous way, we feel we are in touch with the cosmic harmony. Even our body is a part of the cosmic divine Being, of the *Virāt-Purusha*. Our mind is part of the cosmic mind. Our soul is part of the cosmic Spirit. Many who practise the spiritual discipline and meditation, attain to this state of

consciousness. If we follow the way of *japa* and meditation correctly, we too are sure to be blessed with some form of divine vision, with some form of divine experience. That increases our faith and makes our mind steady in our path of meditation.

Mind wants to run away from the object of meditation. Now, through the practice of moral culture we have succeeded in minimizing the disturbance of the mind. And further, as we do our *japa* and meditation, we are giving the mind a certain theme, that is, the divine name we repeat. This draws our attention; we visualize the divine form and that again holds the mind. We think of the Supreme Spirit and we think of Him with a little love in our heart. So, when there is a little love in our heart and devotion for the ideal, it becomes easy for us to follow the path of *japa* and meditation.

And what *japa* and meditation do is this: they keep the mind engaged. The sound, the divine form, and the idea, along with that love, keep the mind concentrated. When our interest in the object of meditation becomes greater

than our interest in outside things, the former becomes a fact. Mind, at least for a little while, dwells on the Supreme Spirit, dwells on the Divine Blissful Form, dwells on the noble attributes; then there comes a time when one feels the divine presence. In the lives of the spiritual seekers we find in this age, many are blessed with the divine form, blessed with the divine vision. The divine Being manifests Itself in some aspect or other: then He becomes the *guru*.

The guru is within

Our teachers tell us that the *guru* is within. We may take the help of an outside teacher at the beginning of our spiritual life, but as we advance, we find the real *guru* is inside and we must place ourselves at the feet of the divine *guru* within. It takes the disciple step by step from lower rungs of spiritual experience to higher and higher rungs. That is what happened to the saints, the saints we have met. If we know how to tune ourselves, we can listen to the experiences of all the saints, their songs, the outpourings of their heart, the

expression of their spiritual realizations. These experiences actually take place. If we sincerely follow this spiritual path, after having fulfilled some of the conditions, we are sure to get some results. That is what Swami Brahmananda used to tell us. That is what he tells us in the passage we read.

Self-surrender to the Lord

The results of meditation are sure to follow, but as we go on with our *japa* and meditation, let us not look for the results too much. Results will come by themselves. By being over-anxious about the results, we will be forgetting to do our spiritual practice properly and here comes the most important question of self-surrender. Patanjali, the yoga-teacher, said, 'By sacrificing all to *Isvara* comes *samādhi*'.¹¹ Surrender yourself completely: offer all the fruits of your labour, of your spiritual practice, to the Supreme Being. Learn to connect your little 'will' to the 'divine will', and then a miracle takes place. That Truth, that

11. समाधि-सिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् । *Yoga-Sutras*, 2. 45.

Reality which shines within, which shines outside, reveals Itself in all Its glory and then there comes the communion between the soul and the Oversoul. Swami Vivekananda has given us a definition of religion: 'It is, therefore, the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God.'¹² But, with a view to realizing that, we have to take various aspects.

Cultivate a definite attitude

Here comes a very important question of finding out where you stand. Find out with what attitude you have to approach the Supreme Being. Very few of us are competent to approach the Supreme Being as the Soul of our souls. We are like children. We want to depend on the divine Being, just as a child depends on the father or the mother. We need a friend we need a life's companion, we need one who would love us, whom we can make the centre of our love, the centre of our emotion. Now the Lord is there, He is manifest in

12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1997), vol. III, p. 4.

these countless forms and relations. Take up any one of those. In our study of the various sects of Hinduism we find the devotee begins spiritual life with the worship of God as the Master, the Father, as the Mother, or even as the Divine Child. There are devotees who would like to love the Lord as Krishna-Child or Rāma-Child. Other devotees would like to worship the Mother of the Universe, worshipped as Umā or Kumārī. Now what happens? Through all these forms of worship, through all these forms of meditation, the mind and heart become pure. As has been said, the purity that we attain through the practice of morals is not enough. We want a higher type of purity, the purity that enables the soul to detach itself not only from the body, the senses, and the mind, but also from this little ego—the last bondage that the soul has to overcome.

One Self in all

The union between the Ātman and the Paramātman is to be brought about. And as the Supreme Being, the Supreme Teacher,

reveals His glory, the devotee realizes that the God he has been worshipping is not only inside but is also manifest in all. And then begins a new life, a fuller life. As Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*: 'With the heart concentrated by yoga, with the eye of evenness for all things, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.'¹³ Now the devotee realizes the Ātman that is inside is also outside, and, seeing the Lord manifest in all, he worships Him in everyone.

For one's salvation and world's welfare

Now, here is a point to understand. Remember most of us are fit to take up only some personal aspect of the Deity. If I approach God, looking upon Him as the Master, and myself the servant, let us not at the same time, forget our fellow-beings. We are all servants of the Supreme Spirit. If we are bold enough to think of God as the Soul of our souls, then let us remember, we are all fellow-souls eternally connected with the Supreme Spirit and, through

13. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6. 29.

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our connection with the Supreme Spirit, connected with one another. Then our life takes a new turn. The great ones who told us, 'Work and worship should go hand in hand', told us also, 'Hold this ideal before you: "For one's own salvation and for the good of the world."'¹⁴ You have to strive for your own salvation, strive for your own spiritual illumination or spiritual freedom. At the same time, strive to promote the welfare of all. The illumined soul alone can see God in everyone and his service is spontaneous. But those of us who are still in ignorance must strongly think we are all connected with one another through the Divine Spirit and therefore, as we try to promote our own welfare, let us also try to promote the welfare of all.

Here the instruction we received 'Work and worship should go hand in hand' comes to have a new meaning. As we try and progress in meditation, as we try to grow inwardly, we work not only for the members of our family, we try to work also for the wel-

14. आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्विताय च ।

fare of others. What a beautiful order would have been in the world if this were practised! If, as each one of us would think of oneself, we also thought of others, we would surely get much more. Ordinarily in the selfish mood, we think, 'Well, I am interested only in myself.' But, when the outlook broadens we feel we are all parts of a greater whole and then we feel great kinship and nearness with everybody. And when everybody would try to apply the ideal of 'work and worship' with this cosmic view, our lives would become sweeteⁿ and fruitful; our spiritual path would become a fact of consciousness.

So let us remember 'Work and worship should go hand in hand'; and as we try to promote our own welfare, let us try to promote the welfare of all. Thereby let us realize in a very, very definite way, the Lord who dwells within our self is the Lord who dwells in everyone, the Supreme Being in whom we live, move and have our being. And let us always pray, 'May He guide our understanding and enlighten our consciousness.'

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOURS OF MEDITATION*

A pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a pilgrim, a travelling through a strange country or to some place deemed sacred, in order to observe some religious vow or duty or obtain some spiritual or miraculous benefit. In every religion there is the age-old idea that there are certain places specially holy to its votaries. Making pilgrimage to such places is considered very meritorious. Hence devout people look forward to that great occasion when at least once in their life they would be able to make the pilgrimage. When this is

* *Prabuddha Bharata*, May, June, July, and August 1980.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 103

accomplished with great satisfaction and thankfulness, they look upon it as a landmark in their life.

In practice it is seen that those who go on a pilgrimage prepare for it for a long time. Those who are not rich save money little by little, years on end for the purpose. They take vows and pray so that their objective may be fulfilled. They also arrange their affairs in such a manner that they can go away from home for a considerable time, to devote themselves entirely to religious pursuits, without being encumbered by worldly preoccupations. Moreover, they all along look forward to this pilgrimage as a great occasion of spiritual promise.

What one is going to get from a pilgrimage entirely depends on one's personal attitude and preparedness. A person may go even to a place of pilgrimage as a tourist, a sightseer, an archaeologist or a business man. From such a visit to such a place he is not likely to derive any spiritual benefit. To derive spiritual benefit one has to go there as a pilgrim, as a spiritual seeker. There is no other way of entering into the spirit of the place and deriving benefit from it.

Figuratively speaking, the journey of life, the time spent in passing through the world to what has been called 'the better land' is also called a pilgrimage:

Every form of life, like a river, is on a pilgrimage, flowing towards the great ocean of self-fulfillment which is God. It is the journey of the bound towards liberation, of the ignorant to illumination, of the fearful to fearlessness, of the mortal to immortality.

Whether or not we want it this way, life is this way. We finite beings are pilgrims to infinitude. All our struggles and attainments, joys and sorrows are leaving behind the mileposts on the way. We are all on the move. We are wayfarers, pilgrims.

Even without our knowing it, we are all truly pilgrims. But what makes all the difference in the world is to stay a pilgrim in the threshold of life, knowingly. Such a person considers himself a spiritual seeker. A true spiritual seeker aspires to spiritualize his whole life. Spiritualization of life is possible only through living it as a pilgrim, who deliberately moves towards his destination.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 105

How can we spiritualize our whole life?

Obviously, we have to live our life from day to day. Therefore, to be able to spiritualize the whole span of our life, we need to know nothing more or less than the methods of spiritualizing our daily life.

How can we spiritualize our daily life?
This can be done by living it as a pilgrim.

We know everyone who goes on a pilgrimage has a destination. What should be the destination of a person who moves on in his daily life as a pilgrim? It can be only the hours of meditation, prayer and devotions, when he exclusively devotes himself to the practice of spiritual disciplines.

A destination, we have to remember, is a place towards which one deliberately moves on and looks forward to reaching, no matter what the distractions and obstacles on the way. In fact, one tries to turn and shape everything in such a way as may be helpful towards reaching the destination, and enriching the stay there at.

Here comes the question of attitude and preparedness.

Why do we say that the hour of meditation or prayer is the destination of the daily pilgrim? Because it is from the strivings of these hours or hour, as it may be, that the spiritual aspirant seeks to derive direct spiritual benefits. Whatever we may or may not think, may or may not do during the whole day, has an indirect bearing on our spiritual life. But spiritual practices as such, when done properly, have a direct bearing.

Need for meditation

Those who are well convinced that attainment of spiritual illumination or Godseeing is the ultimate objective of life, and from that perspective have been able to correlate all the facts and forces of life, will readily agree that the most important thing to be done in life is meditation, or worship of God in the ways suitable to us.

It is good to be absolutely clear in our mind on this point as to how meditation is the most important thing to be done in life. In the pedestrian's calculating business language, we may ask: well, what do we gain by meditation?

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 107

The *Chāndogya Upanishad* says:

Whoever here among men attain greatness, they have, as it were, a part of the reward of meditation. Thus, while small people are quarrelsome, abusive, and slandering, great men appear to have obtained a share of meditation. Reverence meditation.

He who reverences meditation as the Supreme, as far as meditation reaches, so far has he ultimate freedom.¹

The *Maitri Upanishad* teaches:

The Supreme is attainable by knowledge, by austerity and by meditation.²

1. ...य इह मनुष्याणां महतां प्राप्नुवन्ति
च्यानापादांशा इवैव ते भवन्त्यथ येऽत्पाः कलहिनः
पिशुना उपवादिनस्तेऽथ ये प्रभवो ध्यानापादांशा
इवैव ते भवन्ति ध्यानमुपास्वेति ॥
स यो ध्यानं ब्रह्मत्युपास्ते यावद्ध्यानस्य गतं
तत्रास्य यथाकामचारो भवति ... ।

Chāndogya Upanishad 7.6.1-2

2. विद्यया तपसा चिन्तया चोपलभ्यते ब्रह्म ... ।

Maitri Upanishad 4.4

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* teaches:

Some by meditation perceive the Self in themselves through the mind, some by devotion to knowledge, and some by devotion to work.³

This call of Buddha goes to everyone who aspires for higher life:

Meditate, O mendicant, be not heedless. Let not your thought delight in sensual pleasures, that you may not for your negligence have to swallow the iron ball, that you may not cry out when burning. This is suffering !

There is no meditation for one who is without wisdom; no wisdom for one who is without meditation; he in whom there are meditation and wisdom, he indeed is close to *nirvāna*.⁴

3. ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।
अन्ये सांख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥

Bhagavad-Gītā, 13.24

4. *Dhammapada*, 371, 372.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 109

You may not be anxious for liberation right now—you may like to live on in a lower key—you may want to live a good life in this world as a householder. What purpose does meditation serve for you, then? Meditation serves the greatest purpose for you, even though you may not be wanting to attain salvation but desiring to live a good life in the world.

(a) Meditation gives you a better hold on your own mind, with which you can function each successive day more efficiently and effectively in the work-a-day world.

(b) No life of sanity, probity and dignity is possible for one who never meditates, knowingly or unknowingly.

(c) Meditation alone can plant within us that protective conquering principle which can help us to outgrow all adverse situations of life, all tests and turmoils.

(d) A man of meditation is any day a man of better stuff than one who never meditates.

(e) There is no way of transforming the animal man into a spiritual man except through meditation.

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(f) One cause of the terrific increase of mental diseases in the world is the lack of meditation.

(g) Those who wish to escape the psychiatrist's costly couch will do well to learn from an authentic teacher how to meditate.

(h) Peace of mind cannot be for one who does not meditate. And how can anyone be happy without having peace of mind?

(i) You may not be anxious for illumination, but certainly you want to be happy. In any case meditation is the most intelligent and important thing any human being can do in his daily life.

(j) No matter who you are, or what you are, meditation will always help you in every situation and stage of life.

Mental preparedness

In a war, the performance of a soldier on the battlefield is undoubtedly most important. But the quality of his performance will depend on the type of training he received in the army barracks outside the battlefield. It is undoubtedly very important how we carry ourselves during the hours

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 111

of spiritual practice, but the quality of our spiritual practice will depend entirely on how we have thought and acted and prepared ourselves in the hours *we were not* actually meditating.

Brother Lawrence, the great mystic, wrote to a nun:

One way of becoming recollected easily at the time of prayer, and of remaining so, is to keep the mind under control at other times—that is keep it strictly in the presence of God. Being accustomed to think of Him often, it will then be more easy to remain undisturbed in prayer, or at any rate to recover from distractions.⁵

Broadly speaking, for effective pilgrimage to the hour of meditation four things are necessary: (a) cultivation of a proper attitude to meditation; (b) general preparation for a

5. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. Donald Attwater (Springfield, III: Temple-Gate, 1963), p. 37.

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meditative life; (c) removal of the causes which are inimical to meditation; (d) performance of such deeds as are helpful to meditation.

For reasons we have discussed, we must consider the hour of meditation as the most precious hour of the day, the true destination, psychologically speaking, where we deliberately get our spiritual destiny moulded, with the powers of our mind placed in the hands of the Lord, as it were.

We must develop a pilgrim's attitude to this hour of meditation. We must consider this hour as the destination: of what we do and what we refrain from doing in our daily life. Everything will be done for meditation to be done.

To this hour we should proceed with faith, reverence and a sense of dedication.

Guidelines to dive deep

In a place of pilgrimage there may be many distractions, but the true pilgrim does not notice them. He straight goes to the shrine to see the deity. Likewise, the hour of meditation may offer us many distractions or enjoyments, but the true aspirant refuses to notice any of them.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 113

He only seeks to dive deep in meditation and the practice of other spiritual disciplines.

By way of general preparation for being able to live a meditative life, we shall have to educate our mind in a new way, specially for this purpose: life will have to be regulated by a well-devised routine with a will to meditate; mind must be trained to renounce all vain pursuits, struggles, egoism, pride and prejudices and accept the inevitables of life.

For moulding a mind suitable for meditation the Buddha advised householders and monks to contemplate on these five inevitables of life: (i) Old age will come upon me some day and I cannot avoid it. (ii) Disease can come upon me some day and I cannot avoid it. (iii) Death will come upon me some day and I cannot avoid it. (iv) All things I hold dear are subject to change and decay and separation, and I cannot avoid it. (v) I am the outcome of my own deeds and whatever my deeds, good or bad, I become their heir.

Explaining why one should contemplate on these five things the Buddha said:

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- (i) By contemplating on old age the pride of youth can be curbed, at least reduced.
- (ii) By contemplating disease the pride of health can be curbed, or at least reduced.
- (iii) By contemplating death, the pride of life can be curbed, or at least reduced.
- (iv) By contemplating change and separation of the things held dear, the passionate desire for possessions is curbed or at least reduced.
- (v) By contemplating that one is the result of one's own deeds, the evil propensities of thought and deed are curbed or at least reduced.⁶

One who contemplates these five things can curb or at least reduce his pride and passion, and thus be able to tread the path of *nirvāna*. With ego and passions attenuated we have a new mind, a new understanding. It is this reconstructed and cultivated mind that is helpful for meditation. Those five inevitables should constitute a basic philosophy of life for

6. See *Sermons and Sayings of the Buddha*, comp. Sudhakar Dikshit (Bombay: Chetana Ltd.), pp. 49-50.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 115

all who want to meditate. Otherwise meditation will be impossible.

In another sermon the Buddha says that to become fit for meditation one must get rid of six things: craving for pleasures of the senses; ill-will; sloth; flurry; worry; suspicion.⁷ Why should these six things be got rid of? Because they make concentration of mind well-nigh impossible. And without concentration of mind, meditation simply cannot be done; for meditation is nothing but prolonged concentration.

How these six make concentration well-nigh impossible should be clearly understood. Clear understanding of their harmful nature in reference to concentration will by itself help us to get rid of them.

We will have known it from our experience that craving for sense pleasures keeps our minds in a flutter, makes us nervous; involves us with other minds and their complexities and cross-currents; and exhausts our physical

7. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

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energy. Whereas for practising meditation we require a non-nervous, calm and tranquil state of mind. We require to be free of involvements with the cravings of other minds. Above all, we require the conservation of physical and mental energy, for meditation requires, if we may say so, a lot of 'fuel'.

If anyone wants to stand stoutly for sense pleasures, he is free to do so. But the point that is to be clearly remembered is that meditation and craving for sense pleasures cannot go together, as light cannot walk arm in arm with darkness. Now one may choose.

It will create whirlpools in the mind and stir up the mud and silt of the baser passions from the subconscious, and thus destroy tranquillity altogether. Without tranquillity of mind, how can one meditate? You may be in a perfect posture of prayer. But if you are bursting with animosity or anger what sense do folded hands make? Therefore Christ admonishes:

Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar and rememberest that thy brother hath

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 117

aught against thee, leave then thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.⁸

For meditation, it is not a question of removing individual cases of ill-will or friction, but it is a question of losing the capacity to cherish ill-will for anyone, and of cultivating the attitude of positive and unqualified goodwill towards everyone and everything in the universe. Therefore, before we commence meditation, we are advised to send thoughts of goodwill, peace and harmony in all directions in the universe. In the famous *Metta-sutta* Buddha advises that this attitude should be cultivated not only when we try to meditate but always, while walking, sitting, lying down, eating or conducting business. One who does so train his mind, for him meditation becomes a spontaneous joy of his heart.

Good human relationship is an aid to all spiritual strivings. In order to make a successful

8. *Matthew*, 5.23-24.

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pilgrimage to the hour of meditation, in the course of the day, through our transactions, we shall have to so conduct ourselves that we may not cause unconscionable frictions in our human relationships. If we wound anyone's feelings or make anyone angry by our wrong conduct, the vibrations of his disturbed mind are likely to activate adverse thinking processes in our minds when we try to meditate. Most of us must have observed this in our own experience.

General goodwill, right and pleasing conduct, fulfilment of our basic duties to others, and good speech can largely help us in keeping our human relationships in order. But we must remember that in human relationship there are two sides. Suppose you come up against some aggressively overbearing, unreasonable and incorrigible person, what will you do then? The answer to this question will be found in principle in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. One day Bhavanath, a devotee, said to Sri Ramakrishna: 'I feel disturbed if I have a misunderstanding with someone. I feel that in that case I am not able to love all.'

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 119

Sri Ramakrishna: Try at the outset to talk to him and establish a friendly relationship with him. If you fail in spite of your efforts, then don't give it another thought. Take refuge in God. Meditate on Him. There is no use giving up God and feeling depressed from thinking about others.

Bhavanath: Great souls such as Christ and Chaitanya have admonished us to love all beings.

Sri Ramakrishna: Love you must because God dwells in all beings. But salute a wicked person from a distance. You speak of Chaitanya? He also used to restrain his spiritual feelings in the presence of unsympathetic people. At Srivas' house, he put Srivas' mother-in-law out of the room, dragging her out by the hair.

Bhavanath: It was not he but others who did it.

Sri Ramakrishna: Could the others have done it without his approval? What can be done? Suppose a man cannot make another love him; must he worry about it day and night? Must I waste my mind,

which should be given to God, on useless things? I say: 'O Mother, I don't want Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal or anybody. I seek Thee alone.' What shall I do with men? When I attain God I shall attain everything.⁹

Spiritual life cannot be built up without great self-exertion. Seekers of ease and comfort cannot master the wrong forces within themselves that will have to be subdued and conquered before they can really meditate. Unless one eschews idleness altogether, one cannot even develop a proper frame of mind for meditation.

Worry creates eddies in the mind, and destroys the power of concentration. Therefore one should carefully remove the causes of worry. Worry may arise from guilt-sense, sense of insecurity; vital wants; and some other causes. Guilt-sense can be removed by sincere repentance, firm resolution not to repeat sins,

9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1997), p. 572.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 121

and prayers. Want and insecurity may be removed through intelligent self-exertion in a practical manner.

Suspicion is a disease of the mind. It opens the mind to endless distractions and contamination, and one cannot meditate with a distracted and contaminated mind. One should fervently pray that one may be saved from such a terrible mental disease as suspicion.

The pilgrim to the hour of meditation should live his daily life in such a way as may be helpful in getting rid of these six obstacles to meditation, namely, craving for sense-pleasures, ill-will, sloth, flurry, worry and suspicion. Moreover, the aspirant must stop all wastage of mental energy. An exhausted mind is no good for meditation. Mental energy is wasted by gossip, inconsequential controversy, fault-finding, emotional kite-flying, dabbling in other's affairs, useless work, and senseless fantasies.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* teaches: 'Give up all vain talks.'¹⁰ In other words, remember God

10. . . अन्या वाचा विमुच्यथ . . .

Mundaka Upanishad, 2.2.5.

constantly. Constant remembrance of God is one of the most effective methods of saving mental energy.

Positively speaking, the pilgrim to the hour of meditation must live a strictly moral, balanced and consecrated life. He should fulfil his duties and obligations to family and society. His moral life must be based entirely on truthfulness in thought, word and deed. He should put into practice the ten commandments or their equivalents as taught in his religion.

Even a moral man may be unbalanced. But unbalanced living is unhelpful for meditation. According to Sri Krishna and Buddha the middle path is most efficacious for the contemplative life.

Sri Krishna teaches in the *Gītā*:

Yoga or meditation is not for him who eats too much, nor for him who eats too little. It is not for him who sleeps too much, nor for him who sleeps too little.

For him who is temperate in his food and recreation, temperate in his exertion

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 123

and work, temperate in his sleep and waking, yoga puts an end to all sorrows.¹¹

No fruitful pilgrimage to the hour of meditation is possible for those who do not follow this teaching of Sri Krishna to the extent of making the spirit of it their very second nature.

In this regard Buddha brought the lesson home from his own personal experiments and experiences. He taught:

Bhikkhus, those who are in search of truth must always avoid the two extremes. The first extreme to be avoided is the life of luxury and passion, as it enslaves man to gross needs and debases his human qualities. The second extreme to be avoided is the life of self-torture through penance, because it is not only painful, but useless.

11. नात्यशनतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनशनतः ।

न चाति स्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥

Bhagavad-Gitā, 6.16-17.

The middle path is the best; it produces insight and mental calm, which ultimately lead to *nirvāna*.¹²

The analogy is given of a stringed instrument. When the strings are slack they make a drab sound if struck; when they are too tight they snap. It is only when the strings are neither too slack nor too tight, but properly tuned, that one can have music. Those who are too high-strung, and those who are not wound up at all, neither of them can properly meditate. For effective meditation, we need physical fitness, mental calmness and emotional balance. Fulfilment of obligations and duties at home and society is important because, in the case of it not being done, no one is going to leave you at peace. Besides, your conscience, the inner mentor itself will make you restless. Robbed peace and quiet from within and without, will make meditation impossible. Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

12. *Sermons and Sayings*, pp. 1-2.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 125

Do not let worldly thoughts and anxieties disturb your mind. Do everything that is necessary in proper time, and let your mind be always fixed on God.¹³

If everything that is needed to be done is not done in 'proper time', there will be cause for anxiety and it will be difficult to fix the mind on God.

When you are expected to go to the ration shop to collect your quota of sugar, go there promptly to stand in the queue. Instead, do not sit for meditation right then, for in that case you may lose not only the quota of sugar, but peace at home and also meditation! The earnest pilgrim to the hour of meditation should not think that sugar is a paltry thing and peace at home can be ignored.

Householders desiring to practise meditation and other spiritual disciplines, should not allow themselves to be irked by the

13. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math 1975), saying No. 451.

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necessities of their situation in life. Rather, they should follow in a genial temper the strategy taught by Sri Ramakrishna of making spiritual life work in the worldly set up. No doubt he uses an unpleasant analogy; but all the same, he makes it impossible for you not to catch the meaning. He says:

You are talking about your leading a householder's life. Suppose you are a householder. It rather helps in the practice of spiritual discipline. It is like fighting from inside a fort. The Tantriks sometimes use a corpse in their religious rites. Now and then the dead body frightens them by opening its mouth. That is why they keep fried rice and gram near them and from time to time they throw some of the grams into the corpse's mouth. Thus pacifying the corpse, they repeat the name of the Lord without any worry. Likewise, the householder should pacify his wife and other members of the family. He should provide them with food and other necessaries. Thus he removes

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 127

the obstacles to his practice of spiritual discipline.¹⁴

So it is important to have a ready supply of 'fried rice and gram'!

But we should not have an exaggerated notion of duty-consciousness. When it is not kept within proper bounds, it may very well prove itself to be the blazing 'midday summer sun' which scorches the innermost soul of mankind. Swami Vivekananda warns:

Look at those poor slaves to duty! Duty leaves them no time to say prayers, no time to bathe. Duty is ever on them. They go out and work. Duty is on them! It is living a slave's life, at last, dropping down in the street and dying in harness, like a horse. This is duty as it is understood. The only true duty is to be unattached and to

14. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1997), p. 244.

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work as free beings, to give all work unto God.¹⁵

One should know where one's duty begins and ends. It has also to be remembered that all duties have to be subservient to the highest duty, namely, meditation, or growing in spiritual consciousness.

Consecrate your thoughts

If you would remain a devoted pilgrim to the hour of meditation, do not let your cat come between you and your God. What a funny precept! you might exclaim. But no, Sri Ramakrishna seriously warns:

There are people who are so situated in life that naturally they have nothing in the world to attract them, but would yet create for themselves some attachment and get themselves bound by it. They neither want nor like to be free. A man who has no family to care for, nor relatives to look

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), vol. 1. p. 103.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 129

after, generally takes a cat or a monkey, or a dog, or a bird for a pet and fondles it, and thus 'slakes his thirst for milk with mere whey'. Such is the snare that māyā's charm has set for humanity !¹⁶

Though the seemingly ubiquitous snares of māyā would appear to make the pilgrimage a perilous journey, no matter how sincere we are, Sri Ramakrishna assures us:

There is little fear that a ship will drift or run into danger as long as its compass points due north. So the ship of life steers clear of every danger if the mind, its compass needle, is always turned towards God, without any oscillation.¹⁷

The earnest pilgrim to the hour of meditation should always practise this central teaching of Sri Ramakrishna: 'Never squander the energies of your mind.' This is essentially the same teaching as that given in the

16. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, No. 191.

17. *Ibid.*, No. 452.

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Upanishad: 'Give up all vain talks.' Positively speaking this means 'keeping the compass needle always turned towards God.'

How we do it is an important practical question. The imperative and necessity of constant remembrance of God may disturb many, for on checking, it will be discovered that most of us do not remember Him constantly. We may perhaps remember Him only occasionally and accidentally. Some seem also to be apprehensive that in the developing technological age in which we are destined to live, constant remembrance of God is going to become increasingly difficult. Even if such apprehensions were not utterly groundless and highly imaginary, all those who for any reason do not and cannot constantly remember God, can derive consolation, inspiration and guidance from Sri Ramakrishna's parable, 'Nārada and the cup of oil':

Once upon a time conceit entered into the heart of Nārada, and he thought there was no greater devotee than himself. Reading his heart, the Lord said, 'Nārada, go to

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 131

such and such a place. A great devotee of mine is living there. Cultivate his acquaintance, for he is truly devoted to me.' Nārada went there and found a farmer who rose early in the morning, pronounced the name of Hari (God) only once, and taking his plough, went out and tilled the ground all day long. At night, he went to bed after pronouncing the name of Hari once more. Nārada said to himself. 'How can this rustic be a lover of God? I see him busily engaged in worldly duties and he has no signs of a pious man about him.' Then Nārada went back to the Lord and spoke what he thought of his new acquaintance. Thereupon the Lord said, 'Nārada, take this cup of oil and go round this city and come back with it. But take care that you do not spill even a single drop of it.' Nārada did as he was told, and on his return the Lord asked him, 'Well, Nārada, how many times did you remember Me in the course of your walk round the city?' 'Not once, my Lord,' said Nārada, 'and how could I, when I had to watch this cup

brimming over with oil?' The Lord then said, This one cup of oil so diverted your attention that even you forgot Me altogether. But look at that rustic, who, though carrying the heavy burden of a family, still remembers me twice every day.'¹⁸

One of the ways of frequent remembrance of God is to somehow involve Him in what we think and do in our daily life. The most effective way of doing this is taught by Sri Krishna in the *Gītā*:

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever you practise in the form of austerities, O son of Kunti, do it as an offering to me.¹⁹

This method of consecrated living not only manages to channelize all psycho-physical energies towards God, but also delivers us from the binding effects of karma, good or bad, which

18. *Ibid.*, No. 1086.

19. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 9.27.

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are not helpful to meditation. In the next verse Sri Krishna specifically assures the devotee:

Thus shall you be freed from the bondage of action, which bears good and evil results. With your mind firmly set in the yoga of renunciation, you shall become free and come to me.²⁰

When we continue to undertake our daily pilgrimage to the hour of meditation with this attitude and preparation, every day little by little we succeed in overcoming the inner or outer obstacles on the way and daily come closer to the Lord in our heart.

Orchestration of emotions, actions, and aspirations

One more thing, which is not easy to describe, is also needed. We may call this needed thing an orchestration of all our emotions, actions and aspirations—like a symphony guided and interpenetrated by the main note of an abiding sense of the essential—for a soul-surge absorption into the infinite.

20. *Ibid.*, 9.28.

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God has vibrated forth into becoming everything. Now this God-become-everything will have to be transmuted into everything-become-God.

In this lump of clay which is our body and mind, He also will flash forth as the abiding light.

The technique of this orchestration has to be learnt from a master musician of the spirit. In Sri Śankarāchārya we have such a master musician. In his work *Aparokshānubhuti* he has elaborated with wonderful clarity and also some humour this difficult knowledge. What Śankara has achieved in these passages—we are going to discuss this only very briefly—is a marvellous integration of the knowledge of Advaita Vedanta and practical Yoga, and he has also elaborated the methods of bringing this knowledge into the stream of life. As students of Vedanta we know of that great identity: *ayam ātmā brahma*.²¹ 'This Ātman is Brahman.' The individual soul is identical with the Supreme Spirit.

21. *Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.5.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 135

As students of Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutras* we know that only after properly accomplishing six steps of *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prānāyāma*, *pratyāhāra* and *dhāranā*, can we truly meditate. Meditation is nearly the highest thing a human being can do. The highest attainment is *samādhi*; meditation is only one step lower than that.

What happens to the musician who has one hour's time for performance but tunes his instrument for forty-five minutes? He cannot accomplish much on the stage. An intelligent musician will keep his instrument well tuned before coming to the stage. On stage, after just once testing it he starts off, and soon he will be all music and sway everyone. In like manner, if we want to accomplish anything at the hour of meditation, if we want to be absorbed in the thought of God or Ātman, then we must do all the turning or tuning of our mind to God before we reach the hour of meditation. Otherwise when we will get our mind on hand for meditation, the available time for the purpose will have been over. Therefore, we have to devise some methods of living by which we

can almost involuntarily go on practising the disciplines which spontaneously carry us over to a meditative mood at the hour of meditation. Then, as on stage, we can at once start off, as it were. What can these methods of living be? They are certain habits of deep thinking, as suggested by Śankara in the *Aparokshānubhuti*.

Śankara says:

The Atman that is absolute Existence and Knowledge cannot be realized without constant practice. So one seeking after knowledge should long meditate upon Brahman for the attainment of the desired goal.²²

Integrating the knowledge of yoga and Vedanta, Śankara brings in new insights in understanding the demands of the ancient disciplines of Patanjali.

22. नित्याभ्यासादृते प्राप्तिर्न भवेत् सच्चिदात्मनः ।

तस्माद् ब्रह्म निदिध्यासेज्जिज्ञासुः श्रेयसे चिरम् ॥

Aparokshānubhuti, 101.

PILGRIMAGE TO HOURS OF MEDITATION 137

We know how Patanjali defines his steps to yoga. He says *yama* means non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-receiving of gifts. But what does Śankara say? He says:

The control of the senses by means of the knowledge 'all is Brahman' is called *yama*, and should be practised again and again.²³

Patanjali says *niyama* consists of cleanliness, contentment, austerity, self-surrender to God. Adding a new meaning to the whole concept of *niyama*, Śankara says:

The incessant flow of only one kind of thought relating to the unity of the individual self with Brahman such as 'This Ātman is Brahman' and 'I am Brahman' to the exclusion of all other thoughts is called *niyama*, which verily is the supreme

23. सर्वं ब्रह्मेति विज्ञानादिन्द्रियग्रामसंयमः ।
यमोऽयमिति संप्रोक्तोऽभ्यसनीयो मुहुर्मुहुः ॥ *Ibid.*, 104.

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bliss and is regularly practised by the wise.²⁴

Patanjali defines *āsana* as easy posture. Śankara says:

That serene state of the constitution in which Brahman is incessantly contemplated with unmixed bliss is known as *āsana*, and not others which destroy bliss.²⁵

He further says:

The *siddha-āsana* [accomplished posture] is the Immutable which is the beginning of all beings and the reality behind the universe, that in which the perfected ever repose.²⁶

24. सजातीयप्रवाहस्च विजातीयतिरस्कृतिः ।
नियमो हि परानन्दो नियमात् क्रियते बुधैः ॥ *ibid.*, 105.
25. सुखेनैव भवेद्यस्मिन्नजस्यं ब्रह्मचिन्तनम् ।
आसनं तद्विजानीयान्तरत् सुखनाशनम् ॥ *ibid.*, 112.
26. सिद्धं यत् सर्वभूतादि विश्वाधिष्ठानमव्ययम् ।
यस्मिन् सिद्धाः समाविष्टास्तद्वै सिद्धासनं विदुः ॥ *ibid.*, 113.

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Proceeding, Śankara teaches:

Absorption in the all-pervading Brahman is known as the equipoise of the limbs. Mere straightening of the body like that of a dried up tree is no equipoise.²⁷

What is the right vision? What is concentration? Is it looking at the tip of the nose? Śankara says:

Converting one's ordinary vision into one of knowledge, one should realize the whole world to be Brahman itself. This is the profoundest vision and not that which is directed to the nose.²⁸

We may also take it in a different way, says Śankara:

Or, the vision should be solely directed to that wherein ceases the distinction of seer,

27. अङ्गानां समतां विद्यात् समे ब्रह्मणि लीनताम् ।
नो चेनैव समानत्वम् जुत्वं शुष्कवृक्षवत् ॥ *Ibid.*, 115.
28. दृष्टिं ज्ञानमयीं कृत्वा पश्येद् ब्रह्मयं जगत् ।
सा दृष्टिः परमोदारा न नासाग्रावलोकिनी ॥ *Ibid.*, 116.

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sight, and the object of seeing. It need not be directed to the tip of the nose.²⁹

We have heard a lot of *prāṇāyāma* 'breath control'. Some appear to think that by pressing the nose one becomes a yogi. Sankara gives a wholly new interpretation of *prāṇāyāma*. He says:

The restraint of all modifications of the mind by regarding all mental states like the *chitta* as Brahman alone, is called *prāṇāyāma*.

The negation of the universe is the outgoing breath (*rechaka*). The thought 'I am Brahman' is called the incoming breath (*puraka*).

And the steadiness of that thought thereafter is the restrained breath (*kumbhaka*). This is the *prāṇāyāma* for the wise. [Then Śankara humorously says:]

29. द्रष्टदर्शनदृशयानां विरामो यत्र वा भवेत् ।
दृष्टिस्तत्रैव कर्तव्या न नासाग्रावलोकिनी ॥ *Ibid.*, 117.

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While pressing of the nose is only for the ignorant.³⁰

Pratyāhāra is usually interpreted as the withdrawal of the senses from the sense objects. But Śankara says:

The merging of the consciousness in Brahman by realizing the Self in all objects is known as *pratyāhāra* and should be practised by all seekers of liberation.³¹

By 'concentration' (*dhāranā*) in the ordinary parlance we mean fixing our mind on one chosen object to the exclusion of other objects. But the question is where is the other object when we understand the nature of Reality? So,

30. चित्तादिसर्वभावेषु ब्रह्मत्वेनैव भावनात् ।
 निरोधः सर्ववृत्तीनां प्राणायामः स उच्यते ॥
 निषेधनं प्रपञ्चस्य रेचकाख्यः समीरणः ।
 ब्रह्मैवास्मीति या वृत्तिः पूरको वायुरीरितः ॥
 ततस्तद्वृत्तिनैश्चल्यं कुम्भकः प्राणसंयमः ।
 अयं चापि प्रबुद्धानामज्ञानां घाणपीडनम् ॥ *Ibid.*, 118-120.
 31. विषयेष्वात्मतां दृष्ट्वा मनसम्ब्रिति मज्जनम् ।
 प्रत्याहारः स विज्ञेयोऽभ्यसनीयो मुमुक्षुभिः ॥ *Ibid.*, 121.

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giving a new interpretation of concentration
Sankara says:

Concentration in its highest sense is holding of consciousness by realizing Brahman wheresoever the mind goes.³²

Then he says:

The condition, wherein there is only the uncontradictable thought 'I am Brahman' Itself, and there is no external hold, is denoted by the term *dhyāna* or meditation, which is productive of highest bliss.³³

Absorption in the hours of meditation is our aspiration. Śankara's exposition will have shown what it takes to be absorbed in the Supreme Spirit. We have to get and keep ourselves steeped in these thoughts in and through what we may or may not think and do.

32. यत्र यत्र मनो याति ब्रह्मण्स्तत्र दर्शनात् ।

मनसो धारनं चैव धारणा सा परा मता ॥ *Ibid.*, 122.

33. ब्रह्मैवास्मीति सद्वृत्त्या निरालम्बतया स्थितिः ।

ध्यानशब्देन विख्याता परमानन्ददायिनी ॥ *Ibid.*, 123.

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Saturation of mind right from the morning

Then alone there is a chance of our meditation being fruitful. We need therefore to saturate our minds with the great thoughts during the whole day. Through thinking, these thoughts must become our convictions and habit-patterns. If we want to meditate well in the evening, preparation for it should start in the morning and continue through the whole day. If we want to meditate well in the morning, preparation for it should start on the previous evening. Only he who meditates well in the morning has a chance for meditating well in the evening too. One whose morning passes without meditation, in all probability in the evening too he will not find himself meditating.

The paradoxical law that holds good in meditation as in other spiritual contexts has been defined for all times by Jesus Christ in these words:

For unto everyone that hath shall be given,
and he shall have abundance, but from

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him that hath not, shall be taken away that which he hath.³⁴

Therefore, early in the morning we should fill ourselves with holy thoughts to the maximum, saturate ourselves, so to say, through prayer and meditation. This will give us a frame of mind with which we shall be able to easily go through our daily round of duties without losing our balance, poise and tranquility.

It is important that a portion of the spiritual mood created in the morning be carried like an imperceptible thread through all our actions to the next hour of meditation in the evening. Thus from morning to evening, and evening to morning, we shall carry the refrains of meditation, so that in the hour of meditation we may find ourselves in readiness to spontaneously plunge in. Daily pilgrimage to the hour of meditation is the only way open to man for spiritualizing his life, for reaching

34. Matthew, 25.29.

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the destination of his life, which is realization of God.

To that supreme end which is all illumination, all joy and all bliss, all of us stand cordially invited by the Lord Himself. Let us all enthusiastically and whole-heartedly accept that ever-open invitation of the Lord, and move onward and forward, inward and Godward.

MEDITATION*

The supreme goal of meditation, or spiritual life, or life itself, is to attain the highest kind of *samādhi*. There are three states of consciousness of which we are aware: waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep; beyond these is the Fourth, *turiya*. And that is [*nirvikalpa*] *samādhi*.

Having attained *nirvikalpa*, or the highest *samādhi*, Swami Vivekananda wrote a poem in Bengali which may be summarized in English as follows: 'The world disappears, shadow of ego remains. Now the shadow of ego remains in the lower *samādhi*. In the highest, that also

**Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1977.

disappears; what remains, words cannot express and is beyond our thought's compass.'¹ In *savikalpa samādhi*, ego also remains—but who I am, where I am, and what I am is not known.

Nirvikalpa, then, is the supreme goal. And what do those, who come back from that state, see? They see God everywhere. First, as Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) put it, 'All is not, God is.' Then, 'God is all.' My Master, Swami Brahmananda, once told me, 'When I am in that mood, I see God under the cover of so many sheaths: the sheath of a saint, the sheath of an evil man, the sheath of a thief, the sheath of a good man. But I see nothing but God.'

I was arguing once with one of my brother disciples about a metal idol that Sri

1. The relevant lines of the Bengali song

নাহি সূর্য নাহি জ্যোতি ... are
 ধীরে ধীরে ছায়াদল, মহালয়ে প্রবেশিলো,
 বহে মাত্র 'আমি' 'আমি' এই ধারা অনুক্ষণ ॥
 সে ধারাও বদ্ধ হোলো, শূন্যে শূন্য মিলাইলো,
 অবাঙ্গনসোগোচরম् বোঝে প্রাণ বোঝে জার ॥

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Ramakrishna would take to the Ganges and treat like a little baby. I made the remark that this was done in *bhāvamukha*—that is, in a high spiritual mood. Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] overheard me and said, 'So you have become omniscient.' I said, 'Do you mean to say that with these physical eyes one can see everything, metal also and idol also, as God?' Then in one sentence he solved the problem by saying, 'Show me the line of demarcation where matter ends and spirit begins.' In our eyes everything is material; for those whose spiritual eye has opened, everything is spiritual—then you see nothing but spirit.

Such spiritual vision is the goal. Swamiji defined religion as 'the unfoldment of divinity already within man.' In other words, there is divinity or God within every one of us; to unfold that divinity is religion. So the first thing for a spiritual aspirant to learn is that divinity is within, here—God is within.

This idea that divinity or the Kingdom of God is within is emphasized in all the religions of the world. Everywhere we find this ideal—not only in Vedanta, but also in Christianity,

Islam, Sufism Buddhism. To quote the Bible, 'Ye are the temples of God and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.' 'Neither here nor there, lo, the Kingdom of God is within.' But this truth must be realized. You may go around the world searching for God; you may think, 'If I go to the Himalayas, or to India, or to any cave, I shall find God.' I had always an inclination for practising such austerities, but my Master said, 'No. Find Him here, then you will find Him everywhere. If you do not find Him here, you will find Him nowhere.' And then he added, 'Why do you have to practice austerity? We have done all that for you.'

As Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 'Unaware of My higher state as the great Lord of beings, fools disregard Me, dwelling in the human form.'² We cannot live, breathe, think, or act without the presence of the Lord, the Self, within us. In the *Kena Upanishad* we read:

At whose behest does the mind think?
Who bids the body live? Who makes the

2. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 9. 11.

tongue speak? Who is that effulgent Being that directs the eye to form and colour and the ear to sound? The Self is ear of the ear, mind of the mind, speech of the speech. He is also breath of the breath, and eye of the eye. He who realizes the existence of Brahman behind every activity of his being—whether sensing, perceiving, or thinking—he alone gains immortality.³

Immortality here means there is no more rebirth—not that the body becomes immortal, but you realize in this very life that you have no death.

Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once told me that he went through a period when with every step he took, he felt it was God directing every step. Think of that! But this truth must be realized within one's heart of hearts. Mere talking about it makes no difference. Book learning and repeating like a parrot are nothing.

Vedanta calls the Kingdom of God within

3. *Kena Upanishad*, I. 1. 2.

by the word Ātman. Ātman is Brahman. Man is fundamentally the Spirit of God enclosed in the three sheaths: physical, mental, and causal. They all need food. For instance, without food the physical body cannot persist. The mental (or subtle) body also needs food, such as cultural life, art, science—anything of intellectual nature, And the causal body, known also as *ānandamaya kosha*, the blissful sheath, also needs food—otherwise it dries up. And what is that body's food? Meditation. Longing for God. Thinking of God. That is the food.

Meditation is possible and becomes easier when you have love for God. But how can this love grow? One Bengali song says, 'Think and think and think, and love will grow in your heart.'⁴ The more you think of God, the more you try to keep your mind in God, the more love will grow in your heart. And the nature of this love, the nature of every love, is divine. That the husband loves the wife, or the wife

4. The relevant line of the Bengali song

ହୁବ ହୁବ ହୁବ ରୂପସାଗରେ ଆମାର ମନ quoted here is
ଖୁଁଜ ଖୁଁଜ ଖୁଁଜ ଖୁଁଜଲେ ପାବି ହଦ୍ୟମାଝେ ବୃନ୍ଦାବନ ।

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loves the husband, or the parents love the children—the nature of this love is divine. But again, you have to realize this truth, you have to know it is God you are loving in your husband, and so forth. In the Upanishads there is a story about Yājnavalkya and Maitreyi, his wife. Yājnavalkya was becoming a monk and giving all his wealth to Maitreyi. She asked him, 'You give me all this wealth. Will it give me immortality?' He replied, 'No. It will make you happy in the worldly sense.' Then she said, 'I want that which would give me immortality.' He said, 'You have been my beloved, now I love you the most.' Then he began to teach her: 'Love the husband not for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of God dwelling within the husband. The husband must love the wife not for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of God dwelling within the wife. Love your children not as children but as God dwelling within them.'⁵ Swamiji in fun once said, 'This "renunciation", does it mean, that you

5. Vide *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 2.3.2-5.

should take your husband and drown him in the ocean? Or that the husband should take his wife and drown her in the ocean?

Now the question may arise: if we are fundamentally the Spirit or God, why are we not aware of it? In a sense we are all aware of it, and then again, in a sense we are all seeking God, knowingly or unknowingly. For what is God? First, *Sat*—eternal life. We are all seeking eternal life, but in the physical body generally. Yudhishthira, one of the great Pāndavas, was asked, 'What is the greatest wonder of the world?' He said, 'The greatest wonder is that we see people dying every day, but we never think that we shall die.' Next, *Chit*—pure consciousness. We are using consciousness in everything, but we do not know pure consciousness. Then, *Ānanda*—bliss. We are seeking bliss in the physical sense; we do not know the great bliss that is within, that blissful Ātman. As one psychologist said, the 'urge of God' is within every one of us, but misdirected.

Why is it that we go outward to find God, to get bliss? In the *Katha Upanishad* we read: 'The self-existent made the senses turn out-

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ward. Accordingly man looks toward what is without, and sees not what is within. Rare is he who, longing for immortality, shuts his eyes to what is without and beholds the Self.⁶ In this connection I am reminded of an incident in my life. We were about a hundred pilgrims going to visit Kedarnath and Badri-Narayan in the Himalayas, when we all saw the beautiful sunlight in the Himalayas. And what did all the pilgrims do instead of gazing at that beauty? They sat down and meditated: if that beauty outside is so much, how much more beautiful is that within? In this connection the Western philosopher Spinoza says:

For the things which men, to judge by their actions, deem the highest good are riches, fame, or sensual pleasure. Of these the last is followed by satiety and repentance, the other two are never satisfied: the more we have, the more we want; while the love of fame compels us to order our lives by the opinions of others. But if a

6. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.4.1.

thing is not loved, no quarrels will arise concerning it, no sadness will be felt if it perishes, no envy if another has it; in short, no disturbances of the mind. All these spring from the love of that which passes away but the love of a thing eternal and infinite fills the mind wholly with joy and is unmixed with sadness. Therefore it is greatly to be desired and to be sought with all our strength.

That is, we must seek what the Upanishads describe as, 'The eternal amongst the noneternal, the highest joy, the highest abiding joy amidst the fleeting pleasures of life.'

Now, we must remember that in our search we are only uncovering what is within. As I said, God is already here; spirituality is the unfoldment of that divinity which is already within us. It is not to be accomplished, it is *already* accomplished—only you must take off the covering. For instance, there is a buried treasure which you are walking over all the time—what must you do? Take a shovel and

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dig, until you get that buried treasure! If somebody says there is oil to be found in a certain place, you may go on digging without finding it, but this other discovery is certain because it is always there. But what is the digging? You have to perform spiritual disciplines. Another objection may arise here: howsoever we may do our spiritual disciplines, they are finite—and how can the finite bring us that which is infinite? To this Śankara replied, 'The obstacles are finite. You have only to remove the obstacles and then the infinite shines. The sun always shining is covered by clouds; one gust of wind, and the obstacles that cover the sun move away.'

These obstacles are called *avidyā* or ignorance. This ignorance has two functions; one is covering the reality, the Ātman, and the other is creating something that has no existence—the ego. Try to discover what your ego is. It is just like an onion—you try to find out what is within, peeling one shell after another, until ultimately you find nothing. So are you this physical body? Are you a character or your so-called individuality? If so, a thief might say, 'I

will not give up my thieving because then I shall lose my individuality.' So where is our individuality? It is in the infinite, in God.

From this sense of ego which, as I pointed out, has no reality, there arises attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. We experience attachment to things that give us pleasure and aversion to things that give us pain. And as already mentioned, nobody believes that he will die. This clinging to life is so instinctive, that even those of you who have meditated properly will find that as you are going deep within, you gasp—as if you are losing yourself. But then again, a spiritual man overcomes this instinct.

(Now again, there are two kinds of ego—ego of knowledge and ego of ignorance. Ego of knowledge is that which prompts you to meditate, to long for and think of God. Ego of ignorance is that which takes us away, out into worldly things.)

In order to remove these obstacles we need three important things: human life (which we all have), *mumukshutva* desire or longing for the truth of God, and the grace of a *guru*

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(spiritual teacher) And who is the *guru*? One who has realized God. Otherwise it will be like the blind leading the blind, both falling into the ditch. So you need the *mahāpurusha*—that is, a great soul who has realized God. But if you have that longing, that desire, then God himself comes down in human form to teach you. So the most important thing is that longing.

The knowledge of Brahman is to be heard from the lips of a *guru*. You may not study any scriptures, or you may study all the scriptures of the world, but that wouldn't give you knowledge of God. It has to come from the lips of a *guru*. Scriptures don't give us any directions.

Many times people think that this idea of the *guru* is found only in Hinduism, but it is common to all religions. For instance, in the Bible we read: 'A Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus, and Jesus said to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." (What does it mean to be 'born of water'? Just to be dipped in water? No, it is what we call initiation. Baptism is the

same. And to be 'born of the Spirit' is to attain *samādhi*; then only can you enter the Kingdom of God.) Nicodemus then asked Jesus. 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.' Then he pointed out this beautiful truth: 'And no man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.' Remember: no man hath ascended up to heaven had he not come down from heaven. Everyone of us descended from heaven—and where is heaven? Within. Each one of us has the Kingdom of God within, even as the Son of God, Jesus, had heaven within. In other words, the very birthright of man is divinity. Our very nature is divine, otherwise we could not realize that divine Being.

When we were in the presence of my Master, who was the spiritual son of Sri Rama-krishna, we felt that God was like a fruit in the palm of our hand, He is so easy to know. And my Master told me, 'Have that self-confidence: others have realized God, why can't I also

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realize Him?' Jesus said, 'That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.' To believe in Him means to have real faith. Before coming to this country I went to 'M', the writer of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and asked him one question, 'What have you gained by going to Sri Ramakrishna?' He said, 'Faith!—that unshaken faith that comes after realizing God. As you practice spiritual disciplines, purity of heart will arise and you will see God. Swamiji said that if all the scriptures in the world were drowned but this one sentence from Jesus, religion would live on: 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.'

Now, what are these disciplines? Mainly, we must practice discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal. Everything is in a flux, passing away—today is, tomorrow is not. What is it that stays? Eternal God. But what is this eternal truth? Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Everything has been uttered by the lips of man and therefore soiled—even scriptures. But the truth of God has never been uttered by the lips of man.' Then what are we to do? Meditation,

struggles for spiritual life, scriptures—all are within *māyā*. But *vidyā-māyā*, or ego of knowledge, leads one beyond *māyā*. If there is no ego how can we meditate? And we have to take the help of symbols. Sri Ramakrishna said God is personal, impersonal, and beyond—but we can only think of Him as personal or impersonal. These are not different, however. Brahman is a vast ocean with floating icebergs (or the incarnations of God) of different shapes and sizes. You can take Jesus, or Krishna or Buddha, or Ramakrishna, or the Holy Mother—in each one of them is that eternal Reality. Or you can take a spiritual symbol such as OM—this word, the syllable, is Brahman. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'The eternal Vedantic religion opens to mankind an infinite number of doors for ingress to the inner shrine of divinity, and places before humanity an inexhaustible array of ideals, there being in each one of these a manifestation of the Eternal One.'

Now we come to the actual practice of meditation. After the *guru* has studied the tendencies of the disciple, he selects a chosen ideal

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and gives him a *mantra* accordingly. The disciple begins to meditate, but like Arjuna he feels:

Restless man's mind is,
So strongly shaken
In the grip of the senses:
Gross and grown hard
With stubborn desire
For what is worldly.
How shall he tame it?
Truly, I think
The wind is no wilder.⁷

Sri Krishna answers, 'Yes, Arjuna, the mind is restless, no doubt, and hard to subdue. But it can be brought under control by constant practice, and by the exercise of dispassion.'⁸ (My Master [Swami Brahmananda] used to stress this point again and again, saying, 'Practice, practice, practice!')

Sri Krishna discusses the true nature of meditation in the *Gītā*:

7. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6. 34.

8. *Ibid.*, 6. 36.

'The light of a lamp does not flicker in a windless place': that is the simile which describes a yogi of one-pointed mind, who meditates upon the Ātman. When, through the practice of yoga, the mind ceases its restless movements, and becomes still, he realizes the Ātman. It satisfies him entirely. Then he knows that infinite happiness which can be realized by the purified heart but is beyond the grasp of the senses. He stands firm in this realization. Because of it, he can never again wander from the inmost truth of His being.⁹

Sri Krishna continues:

Utterly quiet,
Made clean of passion,
The mind of the yogi
Knows that Brahman,
His bliss is the highest.¹⁰
Released from evil

9. *Ibid.*, 6. 19–21.

10. *Ibid.*, 6. 27.

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His mind is constant
 In contemplation:
 The way is easy.
 Brahman has touched him,
 That bliss is boundless.¹¹
 His heart is with Brahman
 His eye in all things
 Sees only Brahman
 Equally present,
 Knows his own Ātman,
 In every creature
 And all creation
 Within that Ātman ¹²

The spiritual aspirant, however, does not come to this attainment all at once. Grace tangibly felt like a magnet draws you; then you become a blessing to yourself and all mankind.

In conclusion, I shall quote the great scientist, Albert Einstein:

11. *Ibid.*, 6. 28.

12. *Ibid.*, 6. 29.

The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness.

SPIRITUAL LIFE: ITS CONDITIONS AND PITFALLS*

The 'ancient highway'¹ extending from man to God cannot be compared to an American non-stop 'freeway'. This subtle inner path

* *Prabuddha Bharata, March 1984.*

1. अणः पन्था विततः पुराणो
मां स्पृष्टोऽनुवित्तो मयैव ।
तेन धीरा अपियन्ति ब्रह्मविदः
स्वर्गं लोकमित ऊर्ध्वं विमुक्ताः ॥

'The subtle, extensive, ancient way has touched me. (Nay) I have realized it myself. Through that sages—the knowers of Brahman—(also) go to the heavenly sphere (liberation) after the fall of this body, being freed (even while living).'

Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad, 4.4.8.

has many stops and degrees of grading. In some areas it is level and smooth and in other regions it passes through difficult terrains of dirt and gravel. Its course may run through the outstretches of desert or along the narrow curves and bends of precipitous mountains. In spite of all these obstructions, we have to journey determinedly along this great road leading to God.

Fortunately, all along this path are found rest stops equipped with replenishing fuel, roadmaps, and guides experienced in the nature of travel who give correct directions and assist in safe arrivals. Ancient is this way of spirituality and glittering with bright hopes, but it is also frightening with dark pitfalls. It is a difficult but glorious road to climb. Those who have succeeded on this path offer encouragement with no uncertainty to proceed patiently and cautiously and never to ignore the directions. They assert that we can make it, we *can* reach the goal, we can *know* God in this very life!

The highways and by-ways of ordinary life run on in circles—they seem to lead to

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nowhere. When the realization of the limitations of the treadmill of worldly existence and the futility of worldly pursuits takes hold of the seeking mind, it ignites the flame of spiritual enquiry. A restless yearning for truth and the fulfilment of happiness, an intense desire to understand love's deepest meaning, the fear of death, the apparent elusiveness of God, the contradictory nature of life's experiences—these urge us on to spiritual awakening.

What is spiritual life? A life centred in God. It is not an unusual life. According to the attitudes developed and the manner in which we live, our life on earth can be spiritual or non-spiritual. We are spiritual when the Divine enters our thoughts, actions, desires, emotions and aspirations. Then He is not distant or theoretical, but a living true God guiding our lives. Not understanding clearly the meaning of spiritual life is the first pitfall on the path.

A few basic requirements are necessary for deep and effective spiritual living. First is the faith that the goal sought after does exist, that there is a supreme unchanging Truth—a Reality which is the foundation and operative

power of everything. We have to believe that at the back of the flux and contradiction in this world, including our own life, there is a cosmic intelligence, love and unity which is God.

Though difficult to see at an early stage, it is necessary to believe that this Reality, which is God, can be experienced here and now. He is the supreme object of our love, our everlasting friend and companion. Somehow we have to grow and strengthen this faith. Let us take an example. In the city of Jerusalem, Jesus Christ walked teaching and consoling people and changing their lives; it was there that the final scenes of his life on earth were enacted. Faithful Christians everywhere hope to visit this Holy Land and, even though they have not seen it, they never deny its existence. They know that many people have been to Jerusalem. In the same way, as we put our feet on the spiritual path, let us have this confidence that although God is not yet visible, He is only some distance away—He can be experienced as many fortunate men and women through the ages have found Him in their lives.

The nature of God should remain an open question. Infinite, He manifests Himself in endless ways. The approaches to His nature are various. He is impersonal—without name or form; or Personal—with a Cosmic Personality. He can be given many names and can have many forms. He can come down to man as *avatārs* (Divine Incarnations) like Rāma, Krishna, Jesus Christ, Buddha. It is best not to be caught in a dogma about God. Let everyone have his own conception of Him. The Upanishads tell us that Brahman is both *nirguna* (without attributes) and *saguna* (with attributes)—man can experience God on both these levels.

Spiritual life is difficult for those who are lacking in faith. How to acquire faith? Amid all the doubts and confusions surrounding the existence of God, spiritual teachers reply: 'Through holy company.' Seek those who are living in direct experience of God. In the lives of these persons we witness the proof of God's limitless knowledge and love. Our weak notions become enlivened by holy company.

Holy company also includes the reading of the scriptures of all religions which are the records of direct spiritual experiences of holy men and women. When we read the Upanishads, the *Gitā*, the Bible, and the sacred books of all religions we catch a glimpse of truths which are not the usual truths of this material world. They are spiritual truths. They speak of the harmony, joy, peace and strength of spiritual life. When we read these accounts in the scriptures our faith grows.

Faith of another type is also necessary. It is the faith in ourselves. Swami Vivekananda would say, 'First develop faith in yourself, then faith in God will come.' If doubt comes, limiting our capabilities, we have to do away with it ! Doubt is weakness, an obstruction in spiritual life, a serious pitfall. On the surface man evidently is very limited. His mind, body and energy have limitations, but power and knowledge can be developed. Great potentialities are there deep within the recesses of the mind. Man has a hidden insight, an intuition, by which he can rise to the spiritual level and eventually reach the ultimate destination of

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life—realization of God. So, we should always be careful as to whether our faith, both objective and subjective, is being maintained.

A living and loving interest in the spiritual scheme of life is an essential requirement. A joyful enthusiastic attitude while actively following the guidelines prescribed is necessary to free oneself from mundane distractions and temptations and develop purity of character. Really speaking, the Self, the most essential truth of man, is ever pure and is a spark of the Divine. Of course we make mistakes, but these indirectly help us search for truth and so we should never brood over them. Let us exercise caution and let us not again commit these errors—this is a healthy attitude. With the attainment of pure character undesirable distractions lose their hold on us. We develop an attitude of renunciation, and more and more feel in our heart and mind the Lord's presence. Renunciation is a spiritual attitude. It is not the abandonment of home, family, children, education or job in order to seek the Ultimate. Rather, renunciation is a joyful disregard for undesirable attachments for the sake of God. The heart

will be made pure with the development of this attitude, and, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'.

The spiritual seeker should be on the alert for the unripe ego seeking its expression. The 'I am-so and so' attitude, devoid of spiritual content and affiliation, should be transformed into the attitude of the ripe ego as 'I am God's child, I belong to him, I am what I am due to His Grace.'

Every person is normally very much attached to his or her ego—and thinks, 'I have done this, I possess this, I am that' and so on. There is some joy in this feeling of the ego, but when we come to spiritual life we have to give up this false joy. If there is too much of this ego, it will obstruct our spiritual journey. Since we cannot give it up altogether, it has to be given a spiritual colour. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'There are two kinds of ego—the unripe ego and the ripe ego.' Our lives will become spiritual, pure and fearless, when this unripe or lower ego is subdued and transformed into the ripe or higher ego which says: 'Not I, but Thou'.

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We must have a clear understanding of the different spiritual practices which will assist in our spiritual development. Regularity in meditation, prayer, repetition of the Holy Name, contemplation and spiritual studies are very much necessary. Only earnest seekers will succeed, there is no room for triviality here. Non-attentiveness to a regular routine of spiritual practice is an impediment on the Way. The quality of our application in these practices determines the nature and course of our progress. No one can succeed without patience and perseverance.

We should avoid the possibility of despair and confusion by seeking guidance from experienced persons and by reading the 'roadmaps'. Every phase of life requires guidance, both practical and spiritual. So in order to proceed along the 'highway' safely it is best to stop now and then and seek instruction from an experienced guide rather than push on blindly. Too much pride in ourselves and unwillingness to learn from others is a stumbling roadblock.

Another pitfall is our impatience. After hearing or reading about the blessings of

spiritual life we become eager to have those experiences immediately ! We begin practising some meditation for one or two weeks; nothing remarkable happens and we feel frustrated. Then doubt comes and we impatiently say, 'Oh, let us try another method.' This is a wrong attitude, a serious obstruction. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If you want to dig a well, you have to dig in one and that same place, deeper and deeper.' Upon receiving proper instructions from an experienced teacher, we should carry on our spiritual practice with great care and persistence.

Our interest in spiritual life should be genuine and deep, not superficial or shallow. A superficial mind can not consistently adhere to anything. He may have some little experience and then thinks, 'Well, that is enough'; but he is only fooling himself. Our purpose cannot have depth and sincerity if attachment to sense pleasure exists. The mind will remain on the level of *tamas* and *rajas* leading it restlessly outward. With the calmness of *sattva* the wild horses of the senses can be tamed and quieted by developing self-control. Lack of self

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control is another pitfall, and we should make a regular practice of 'watchfulness' over the senses.

Watchfulness can be achieved by stepping back from the senses. Try to separate yourself from them. Observe and watch the senses reaching outward like tentacles extending in all directions, fastening themselves on this object or that, impelled by desire after desire, and returning to the depository of the mind. Through an awareness of the movements of the mind we can filter out non-spiritual thoughts and ideas before they strike root and contaminate the mind. We can get out of undesirable predicament by observing what is approaching the door of the mind through the senses.

Another obstruction is vain argumentation—too much intellectualism. Spiritual life is experience, it is not words or arguments. On an academic level it is a different issue, like taking a college course in religious philosophy. There we seek information and reason out ideas necessary for the writing of an article or a book. But for our own personal spiritual

experience we do not need very much information or too much argumentation.

When these spiritual practices become fruitful parts of our lives, and when some real advancement becomes noticeable, a particular pitfall must be avoided: the reappearance of that villain—the vain ego! The vain ego will enter, take the platform, demand applause and claim: 'I am such a remarkable fellow. Everyone notices how special I am.' We should be on the watch for the resurgence of this kind of egoism.

So, these are some of the roadblocks that can be expected along the spiritual way. Let us be conscious that these pitfalls are there, but we need not be fearful. We have only to be cautious and prepared. If we have intense faith and are humble, sincere and patient, we need not be afraid of any pitfalls. Spiritual path is a sure path. It will lead us to our destination, namely God, even in this life.

HOW TO DEAL WITH OUR MINDS*

Of all the things in the world, man has found his own mind most difficult to deal with. Although much has been spoken and written on this subject from time immemorial and methods suggested, in every age, man always feels the need of someone to tell him, in the light of the changed conditions of the age, the way of dealing with his mind. In this connection, Swami Vivekananda, the Prophet of the modern age, has said: 'The mind should always go towards God. No other things have any right to withhold it. It should continuously think of God, though this is a very hard task;

* *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1977.

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yet it can be done by persistent practice. What we are now is the result of our past practice. Again, practice makes us what we shall be. So practise the other way; one sort of turning round has brought us this way, turn the other way and get out of it as soon as you can. Thinking of the senses has brought us down here, to cry one moment, to rejoice the next, to be at the mercy of every breeze, slave to everything. This is shameful, and yet we call ourselves spirits. Go the other way, think of God; let the mind not think of any physical or mental enjoyment, but of God alone.... Instead of hearing foolish things, we must hear about God; instead of talking foolish words, we must talk of God. Instead of reading foolish books, we must read good ones, which tell of God.'

What Swamiji says is really true. Our own mind on one hand is our friend, and on the other our foe. When it is under our control, it is our friend. When it has control over us, it is our enemy, our foe. Mind is the cause of attaining enlightenment. Mind is the cause of being in bondage to matter. When the mind is perfectly under control, we know what we

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really are. That means enlightenment. And when we go the other way, we become slaves, subject to matter and mind. Mind is the cause of our sorrow; mind is the cause of our joy.

With mind we think. Sometimes we can think in our own way, we can give our thoughts a direction. Sometimes we cannot. Sometimes mind gets the upper hand and we are at its mercy. Thoughts come which we do not like, thoughts come which are injurious; but we are helpless, though we are not aware of it. If we study the mind, we know how treacherous it is; how much is our slavery to the mind. But we are not aware of it—most of us.

There are social problems, there are national problems, there are international problems, which upset us. But behind all these are the individual thoughts of different persons. What we call national thought is the outcome of the thinking of a large number of individuals. International problems arise out of the thinking of different nations, just as national problems are the outcome of individual thinking.

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It is said that out of the high spiritual aspirations of many individuals in a country or a nation, a saint is produced. In the same way, the anguish of large numbers of oppressed people brings forth a leader, a redeemer who comes, as it were, out of the blue and makes the impossible possible. He appears all of a sudden, and the nation which for so long remained subject and helpless, becomes powerful. It all comes out of individual thinking. Thoughts are more dangerous than atom bombs. Real explosions come from the mind. If a large number of persons begin to think in a certain way, the outcome can be dangerous, especially to those who are oppressing them. So books are prescribed. Those in power want to control the thoughts of others. Some governments with particular ideologies try to mould the thoughts of coming generations in a particular way.

Apart from social, national or international problems, we need for our very existence to find out methods of dealing with our minds.

That is our real problem. The problem does not come from outside; it comes from

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inside, within the depths of our minds. In the *Bhagavad-Gitā*, Arjuna, the disciple, asks a question which is very important for all of us. The question is simple, but it is so pertinent. 'Led by whom does a person commit wrong? Forcibly, as it were, one is dragged to do things which are wrong.'¹ As St. Paul said, man does that which he does not like to do, and he cannot do what he wants to do. Long before St. Paul we find another person (Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata* who said the same thing: 'I know what is right, O Lord, but I cannot do that; I know what is wrong, but I cannot withdraw myself from that thing. ...'² That is our real problem, with which we are forced to grapple. Repentance or confessions cannot serve as remedies.

In another passage of the *Gitā*, Arjuna makes a confession which is also the common problem of humanity with respect to mind.

1. *Bhagavad-Gitā* (hereafter, *Gitā*), 3. 36.

2. The original Sanskrit quotation, which occurs in some versions of the *Pāndava Gitā*, in part runs thus:

जानामि धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्तिः

जानाम्यधर्मं न च मे निवृत्तिः ।

Arjuna says to his teacher, Sri Krishna, 'You talk of calmness of mind, serenity of thought; but I find it is a hopeless task. Mind is so restless! Mind is wild, powerful and strong. One can control the blowing winds more easily than the mind.'³ This is our common problem; this is the real problem. And Arjuna's confession implies the answer. Why are we forced to do things which we do not like to do? Because we have no control over our thoughts. Mind, like a wild horse, leads us to think wildly, and we lose control over ourselves. What is the solution? The solution is to learn how to control the mind, how to be the master of one's mind instead of being its slave.

Mind represents thoughts. Thoughts represent incipient actions. And concrete actions come from incipient actions. It is difficult to control our minds, but to a certain extent we can control our actions. If we think we shall take our dinner at a certain time, very often we succeed. Many actions which we do, we plan and we succeed. We cannot control all our

3. *Gītā*, 6. 33–34.

actions; but sometimes, though not very often, we can control them. It is easier in certain respects than to control our thoughts. Therefore to deal with our thoughts we must begin by controlling our actions. We have to do actions. Fortunate are those persons who find good actions to occupy themselves with.

It is said that this modern industrial civilization has created a great problem of leisure. Leisure brings boredom. Someone wrote that boredom is the most costly disease of the modern age. Through labour unions, people want to get shorter working periods. Yes, there is more leisure, but the real problem is how to occupy yourself in that leisure time. If there are two or three holidays together, people are all out on the roads with their cars. And the number of casualties is very, very large. People cannot be quiet. They want the speed of the motor car in their own lives. If the electricity is out of order and, therefore, television cannot be seen for an hour, some persons feel miserable. They do not know how to occupy themselves, so they turn to television. Many problems come nowadays with the abundance of

leisure. Many persons have not sufficient occupation. It is a blessing to have works to be occupied with.

I have read that Dr. Schweitzer, even at the age of eighty-two, was doing hard manual work. He had many assistants, but he would not allow them to do the work, which he could do. He would say, 'Work is a blessing. Do not rob me of my opportunity to do actions.' As the saying goes, 'An idle brain is the devil's workshop.' No wonder there are so many mental cases nowadays!

To be able to be occupied with works is something. But the work must be good work, the right kind of work, and it must be done in the right spirit. Then through work we can control our thoughts. What is good work and what is bad work? The work that is done with selfish motives is bad work. The work that is done with unselfish motives is good work. As the scriptures say in their metaphysical, abstruse language, you have your ego, your 'I-ness.' The work in which your 'I-ness' predominates is wrong work, the work in which you think you are an instrument in the hands

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of God—'Not I, but Thou, O Lord'—is good work. Not going so high up in the spiritual atmosphere, in our down-to-earth work, whatever you do for others will give you joy. The more you can do for others, the more you can work with some idealism, with some purpose beyond gross selfishness, the greater will be your joy. Not only joy: it will bring you calmness of mind, placidity of heart. Whatever work is done with some idealism, for a purpose that is not our selfish motive, for others, for the country—that is good work. So it is said, the first stage in religious life is to occupy oneself with good works, works done with a spiritual outlook.

What is meant by working with a spiritual outlook? To do work in such a way that it will give us the knowledge of the Self. What is the knowledge of the Self? We are not what we feel we are. We feel we are the body and the mind. It is not so. There is something behind the mind—a background against which the mind plays, sometimes good play, sometimes mischief. Beyond body and mind there is the Self. That Self, because it is spiritual essence, is

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all-pervading. You may call it Brahman, which means infinite; or you may call it God. God is the sum total of all life, the permanent reality behind our ego. The body grows and decays; the mind is fickle, restless, always changing. They cannot be the ultimate reality. Reality is the Self. So what is the spiritual outlook toward work? That attitude by which we can go beyond body and mind consciousness, beyond the body-mind complex. It is a wrong idea that we are body and mind, though we think that way. The body ails and we become perturbed. But there is something behind this body, even behind this mind. So our works should be done in such a way that the consciousness that we are the Self comes uppermost.

One attitude is to do works as a form of worship. Those who believe in God, work for the love of God and not for their selfish enjoyment, not for bodily or mental enjoyment. Why should we work for the love of God? Because that will bring us spiritual unfoldment. We shall be able to go nearer and nearer to the consciousness of the Self or God. That is one attitude.

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Some persons who are not so devotional do work with the ideal: 'I am the Self, I am not the body. The senses do work but I am not involved in that work. I am separate; I am Divine.' Spirit is separate from work. The body does work, but not the Spirit. In that way they develop the consciousness that 'I am Divine.'

Or you may do work for work's sake, not for any gross selfish motive. To work for work's sake means to work because you have to work, otherwise the mind will do mischief. And if you work with a selfish motive, you suffer. As soon as you work with a selfish motive, there will come competition, hopes and fears, worry about gain and loss, and so on. But if you work simply for work's sake, or with some idealism—serving the country, serving the world, in *humility for your spiritual growth*—that will give you placidity of mind. And if you cultivate that attitude your spiritual outlook will be intensified. Even if you have no spiritual outlook to begin with and you find that you cannot control your mind, if you work in this way, spiritual outlook will grow, spiritual consciousness will come. And when spiritual consciousness

comes, your mind gets a direction. From that standpoint, if you know that you are beyond mind, you can control your mind.

As soon as selfishness begins to dwindle, spiritual consciousness comes in the form of placidity of mind. You become placid, you become calm, you get some joy which is quite different from sense pleasure. That joy is much different from what you get by seeing the television or the cinema or a good play. It is altogether different; it is pure, unalloyed. You may get some joy out of television; but the next moment, when it is finished, there is depletion, there is a reaction, and you do not know how to spend the remaining time of the day or night. But by working for others or with a spiritual outlook, you get a kind of joy which you have not experienced before.

To intensify that attitude, it is prescribed to think definitely for the good of all. In the beginning you cannot think of the good of all; it is merely a theory. But when you try to practice, when you try—although you fail—to work for others, then you develop a new outlook, then you can think and pray for the good

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of all. There is a Buddhist prayer (also a Vedantic prayer): 'May all be happy.' Simply by this prayer—if one prays with heart and soul and not simply mechanically, if one meditates on what it means to pray for the good of all—one will have calmness; there will be less of hostile feeling within one. If one has enemies, the feeling of enmity toward them will become less and less.

In the same way, if you deliberately try to feel sympathy for those persons who are suffering—it is called *karunā* in Sanskrit—even if you cannot do anything in action, gradually you will develop great sympathy. That will be an antidote for your ego-centricity, for your pride. If you try deliberately to feel happy for those who are successful in life, that will be an antidote for your jealousy and envy. If you try deliberately to have sympathy for those who fail, gradually you will be less upset by others, you will not find fault with others.

So Buddhist teaching says that you should meditate on these ideas in the morning and try to put them into practice throughout the day. The result will be that you will not be

assailed by so many wild thoughts. You will be regulating your thoughts through your actions and through your meditation. In this way, joy will prepare your mind for the direct attempt to control it. These preparations are necessary for real meditation.

What is meant by trying to tackle the mind directly? Mind represents clusters of unadjusted thoughts, wild thoughts, just like in dreams. In dreams, many thoughts come, which we cannot explain; we don't find any logic behind them. In the same way, in our waking mind such thoughts come in a jumbled form and we don't find any logic to them. But if you act with a spiritual motive throughout the day, if you cultivate these virtues, it becomes easier to control the mind. At least there is the background; already you have achieved some serenity of mind, some placidity of outlook. Then you are ready to begin to pray for the knowledge of the Self. Or if you are devotional, if you believe in God, you just pray for more and more devotion, more and more love for Him, so that you may know the meaning of life.

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For prayer and meditation there must be a higher purpose; not simply: 'Let us control our minds so that we can go after all sorts of pleasures.' That is not meditation. Meditation is not simply an antidote for mental derangement, going to a yogi to get some prescription to meditate in such a way that your mind will not give trouble. You cannot meditate that way. Real meditation must have the definite purpose of obtaining the knowledge of the Self or developing love for God.

Unfortunately, many persons make prayer also a commercial affair. They pray for health or prosperity or success in their business. Real prayer is unselfish prayer—unselfish in the sense that it is not for any worldly gain or sense objects. You pray only for the love of God. That is the highest prayer. It is said that the highest love for God is that in which you do not care whether God loves you or not, it is your *nature* to love God. Philosophically, it is true, God is our real Self; God is all pervading. The kingdom of God is within us, but we are not aware of it. We think we are separate, and so we pray to God, but actually there is Oneness. So the

best prayer is to pray simply for the love of God. It is not theoretical. We love ourselves most and God is within us. We simply put it in an emotional way. This is prayer.

And there is meditation. Meditation means concentrating on a particular thought. The most important thought is that one is divine: 'I am the Self, I am not body, I am not mind.' This is the essence of meditation. A teacher will give you some formula on which you are to think you are to meditate; but virtually it means that: 'I am the Self, I am divine.' In meditation, you deal directly with the mind: you give the mind a right direction.

But you will not succeed all at once. There are so many thoughts coming into the mind. All those thoughts represent the past desires in your life—in this life, or in previous lives, if you believe in reincarnation. Sometimes some unfulfilled past desires come into your mind in this life. Instead of giving importance to them, do not even recognize them. By giving recognition to them you give them life. Instead, try to think of positive things, spiritual things, deliberately. Try to give your thoughts a

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direction. You will not succeed at once, but continue trying from day to day.

So, in answer to Arjuna's plea that the mind is wild and powerful, more difficult to control than the blowing winds, Sri Krishna declares: 'Yes, Arjuna, the mind is restless, no doubt. But it can be brought under control, by constant practice and by the exercise of discrimination.'⁴ Practice means to do a thing from day to day. In the beginning you may not succeed; but through practice you will succeed. When you continue for a long time you will find that wild thoughts will be coming less and less. Thoughts will be simplified—so many thoughts will not come. You will be able to think in a particular way, and you will find out the art of controlling other thoughts.

One method is, just to consider all other thoughts to be non-existent. Just like the patches of clouds in the sky, they are floating there, but they will not bring you rain. You consider the thoughts of the Self to be the only

4. *Gitā*, 6. 35.

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real thoughts, and all others to be unreal. In that way, your mind gets a proper direction.

When your mind gets a correct direction, that means you have found out already, unconsciously, how to deal with the mind. When you have some such control over your mind you do not think at random. Hostile thoughts cannot assail you and disturb you; they come and go like clouds, but when you become indifferent to them, they do not affect you. In that way, you get some degree of control over your mind. That means, you have entered into the real domain of spiritual life.

As you pursue it, more and more control comes. Then you realize what you really are, you realize God. You get the consciousness of God. You realize, actually realize, that you are divine. You are not the body, you are not the mind. You are the Self,—the eternal existence, eternal knowledge and eternal bliss. When you reach that state you are completely safe. No more can mind give you any trouble.

Buddha said, after getting the Enlightenment: 'Life after life I came and my mind gave me trouble. This time I have found out the

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secret: I have got the Enlightenment. No more can mind give me any trouble.' When you get that knowledge, it is yours forever. It is eternal knowledge of your real Self, the universal Self. Then mind and body cannot give you any trouble. You are perfectly satisfied within yourself. You have become identified with Bliss.

THE SCIENCE OF MEDITATION*

From the very dawn of Indian history the Indo-Aryans gave a great deal of importance to the culture and development of the inner faculties of human life. As a result of long experience and experiment, they developed a special system of exercise for increasing the strength, purity and power of those faculties. Having established a fundamental theory that the human body is divided into different layers of being, they discovered various methods of feeding, strengthening, resting and re-energizing them.

The science of meditation was developed in India for the purpose of supplying the mind

* *Prabuddha Bharata*, September 1934.

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with the necessary nourishment and food, and for giving it proper exercise, rest and relaxation, and also for furnishing it with the necessary conditions for growth. Therefore, meditation can very well be defined as the science of supplying the mind with the food, exercise, rest, relaxation, and favourable environment necessary for the manifestation of its highest perfection.

Let us try to understand this analogy. In receiving the food for our physical body, the natural law is, that in the course of metabolism we undergo a process of disbursement and waste, which must be replenished by drawing in a supply from some sources of nature. We eat because we need certain elements and vitamins which we have spent in the course of our work. But the food we eat is not the only kind which we supply to the physical body. The five senses also are drawing in food for its nourishment and development. In the selection of food we have to be very careful, as there can be harmful as well as beneficial foods. For the replenishment of our mental energy, too, we draw in naturally from various exter-

nal sources. There is a special process of meditation which gives us the power of putting ourselves in constant touch with these subtle sources from which we can so abundantly draw our spiritual food, without incurring any expenditure. Therefore, all the consideration we pay in selecting our physical food, must likewise be applied to the selection of the spiritual also.

Culture of mind

The next consideration is to give the mind its necessary exercise. We all know that by lack of exercise our muscles and nerves degenerate and deteriorate; whereas, by regular exercise they can be developed to an almost infinite degree and amount of strength and efficiency. It has been demonstrated by many athletes and men of unusual physical strength, that by proper exercise the power of the muscles and other physical faculties can be developed to any degree of proficiency. The story is told about a farmer who used to carry a little pet calf across a narrow stream. This he did every day until the calf gradually grew up, but the farmer con-

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tinued to carry it without being conscious of its physical development. His attention being drawn towards this fact, he realized that it was a bull which he was carrying so easily. Although this might be only a story, it undoubtedly illustrates how by gradual exercise, one can develop the power of one's muscles to an unbelievable degree of proficiency.

It is not hard to demonstrate the fact, that by means of exercise we can develop the strength of our physical body to an inconceivable extent. The same is true regarding the development of our mental faculties. But through lack of exercise our spiritual and mental powers have pitifully degenerated. Consequently we have lost control over our mind; we have lost our memory; we have lost the power of discrimination, foresight, and many other subtle manifestations of mental power. Since these faculties have been exercised and cultured by many to an amazing degree of proficiency, it proves that anyone can do so by regular scientific exercise.

There are people who have cultured their power of concentration to such an extent that

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they can read any book, page by page, at a single glance. The psychology behind this is not very difficult to understand. We know that when a child learns to read he does so, letter by letter. He must spell each word before he comprehends its meaning. As he grows up, he can read word by word; when he advances further he can even read a whole sentence at a glance. Developing the same faculty still more, a whole thought or a paragraph can be read at a glance. By developing the focus of the mind a whole page can be read just as easily as a sentence or paragraph.

Very often certain problems present themselves to us in our lives. Because we do not know how to bring the mind to a state of peace, poise and tranquillity, we do not arrive at any definite and constructive decision. But a concentrated mind can probe with ease into any deep problem, finding the most wonderful solution which would be impossible for a disturbed mind even to apprehend.

Many other illustrations could be given in order to show the benefits which a fully

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developed and concentrated mind can bring even to ordinary daily life. The culture and attainment of a very healthy condition of the mind is absolutely necessary for every person, no matter what he or she wants to achieve in life.

A mind uncultured and uneducated in meditation and concentration fails to understand clearly the benefits or disadvantages of certain surroundings; whereas a meditative mind can at once accommodate and make the best use of any environment in which it is placed. If a need for change should arise, such a mind knows unmistakably the practical, mental and spiritual processes necessary for making it.

Rest and relaxation

Of great importance is the need for giving complete rest and relaxation to the mind. Mother Nature has arranged for a wonderful process of rest for the physical body by raising that 'blessed barrier between day and day.' But the poor, overburdened mind seldom gets any good rest, even during sleep. It must be given

its proper recuperation by a definite method of meditation. When we do not get sufficient sleep for a few days we know how miserable we feel. The poor mind is kept practically without any sleep, rest, or recuperation from the very day it came into existence until the end of life. No wonder that it has weakened and lost its vitality! But undoubtedly it has a wonderful power of resistance; otherwise it would have been smashed to pieces by the cruel and relentless treatment to which it is constantly subjected.

There is a definite method of meditation to give the mind its much-needed rest and relaxation. Very often we think, wrongly, that a change of occupation brings relaxation. Though we think that we are relaxing, the fact is, we are not. What we actually do is this: we put aside strenuous and tiresome occupations of the mind and change them for something new, or of a lighter type. But this cannot be considered proper relaxation. Real relaxation of the mind can be had only by completely unharnessing the mind from the task of dragging on any physical, intellectual or emotional

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burden. Only when the mind is completely free, when it is not controlled, manipulated or used by any other function, does it enjoy freedom and rest. This state of the mind can be attained only by a special process of meditation and concentration.

The sense of fatigue, disgust or depression of the mind comes only because of a psychological confusion under which we labour every moment. This confusion is caused by miscomprehension of the subject and the object—the 'I' and the 'Not-I.' It is the 'Not-I' which is active, which is doing everything, and which is moving to and fro in this world of phenomena. The real 'I' is the witness; it is the illuminator; it never takes any active part in any of the functions, either of the body or of the mind, save and except illumining them by means of its innate radiance. The moment we are able to distinguish in consciousness between the 'I' and the 'Not-I,' the 'I' or the subject at once gets a wonderful experience of release, rest and tranquillity. This surprising fact needs particular emphasis. Is it not rather strange that although we know that we possess

a body and a mind, for all practical purposes we think that we are the body and the mind? The simple logic to be applied in this case is this: If we say, 'I have a body and a mind,' the relationship between my 'self' and the body and the mind, is one of the possessor and the possessed. The body and the mind are the objects possessed by the possessor, which is the real 'I.' Why, then, is there this meaningless confusion between the possessor and the possessed? Do we not, in our practical life, always take the possessed for the possessor? Is not our ordinary consciousness of the 'I' identical with the body and the mind ? Where has the possessor gone? In fact, the real 'I' is not recognized at all. As soon as we discover and put the real 'I' on its eternal throne of glory, we receive a wonderful experience of rest, relaxation, and complete 'unharnessing of the mind,' no matter what the physical system might be doing. As soon as we realize the independent existence of that higher 'I,' we enjoy the most intense degree of rest, even in the midst of the most intense activity.

Purpose of meditation

The purpose of meditation is to realize the peaceful and all-perfect nature of the Higher Self. Its real nature has been very beautifully described in one of the Upanishads by a very deep and suggestive simile.

Human life has been compared to a gigantic tree which sends its roots down deep into the unfathomable bottom of the Unknown, the Infinite. It is nurtured and nourished by sap of that Infinite, which is Brahman. Its strong trunk is the trunk of *karma*, which has been attained and accumulated through successions of incarnations.

Seated at the top of this tree, but not dependent on it, is a bird, self-poised, self-illuminated and self-contained. It is always happy, always cheerful, and it never depends on anything for its existence, happiness, or knowledge. It radiates brilliance and effulgence; the tree underneath is revealed and illuminated by that heavenly light. It never leaves its throne of glory because it has no desire. It has everything.

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There is another bird, very similar in appearance, which occupies the body of this tree; it has no fixed place of its own, but is moving and hopping constantly from branch to branch. It is eternally hungry and restless! Oh, the voracity and greed of this bird! The more it eats the more hungry it seems to be! Every moment is spent in finding and tasting new fruits. When it tastes a sweet one, it has temporary feeling of joy and happiness. But immediately that sense of satisfaction is gone; it is hungry again. It seizes another fruit, which perchance, is bitter. As soon as it tastes this one, it receives a shock, and looking around catches a glimpse of the beauty, glory, peace and radiance of the self-effulgent bird. It feels a great attraction for and aspires after this higher bird. In the next moment it forgets, and darts after another fruit. While moving in search of fruit, the restless bird, being attracted unknowingly and imperceptibly by the other, is constantly moving towards it. When a sense of satiety and satisfaction comes, it does not want to go round and round in search of fruit any more. It takes a direct flight towards the higher bird and gets

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there quickly. But in most cases, the process of approach towards the higher bird takes place rather slowly and gradually. Eventually, the lower bird comes very near the other and finds reflecting its radiance, peace, poise, and perfection very distinctly on its own personality. Finally, it becomes absorbed and loses its separate existence. It realizes that the lower bird is only a shadow; it is all māyā; the only reality is the higher bird who never took any active part in the process of growth and development in the tree of life.

Our real Self is the higher bird. The lower bird, our physical and mental system, is only the shadow of the higher one. Therefore, our constant effort should be to put ourselves in the position of the top bird.

Always hold your consciousness on the illumined bird; know that you are the 'witness-self.' Affirm inwardly, 'I am not the body or the mind—they are mine. My real 'I' is neither the physical body nor the mind. I am always separate, ever independent, and eternally free from this body. I am the witness; I am only seeing and watching every sensation which is

appearing and disappearing on this physical plane, without in any way taking part in them. I am eternally blissful, self-contained, self-illuminated and self-existent. I am perfection absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. I am That! I am That! Verily I am that illumined Bird, the ever perfect Ātman !'

Making this affirmation, holding your consciousness firmly on the plane of the top bird, let the mind go freely to anything or any thought. Do not try to check it; let the lower bird hop about as it pleases; let it eat all the fruits it wants; upon realizing that it is constantly watched by the higher-self, it will become more and more restful. The yearning will awaken within it to go quickly to its home, which is the position above.

BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

Meditation and Its Methods

Swami Vivekananda's teachings on meditation, its philosophy and practice, reflect the depth and breadth of his own inner realizations and the mystical traditions of India. The book brings 'Vivekananda in person, as it were, to teach us how to meditate. These short, self-contained extracts from his collected works tell us what religion is, why it is of vital concern to us and how we must practise it to make it part of our lives.'

Meditation and Spiritual Life

This uncompromising, but encouraging book is a practical, comprehensive manual on spiritual life with special emphasis on meditation. It contains valuable guidance regarding preliminary preparations, different techniques of meditation, various obstacles that are to be overcome, and the nature of genuine spiritual experiences.

Spiritual Practice

The author has laid down here practical steps for sincere spiritual aspirants. His valuable

suggestions from his practical experience will be a useful guide to all religious aspirants whom modern life assails with various difficulties in the practice of religious precepts.

Mind and Its Control

The control of the mind is not a problem peculiar to religious aspirants; people in all walks of life need to control their minds if they are to succeed in their vocation. No fundamental work for the uplift of the individual or the community can ever be done without mind-control. This book which sets forth the teachings of Vedanta and Yoga on the nature of the mind and ways of controlling it, is meant for all.

The texts listed above, if unavailable at local Ramakrishna Math/Mission centres, can be ordered from

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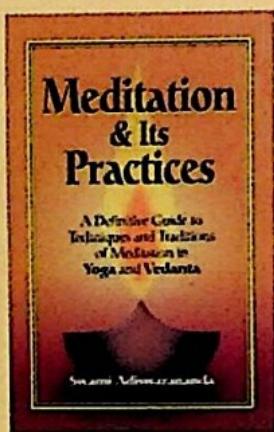
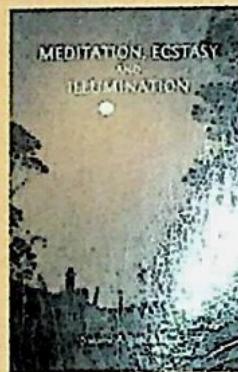
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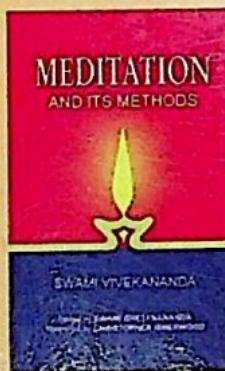
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